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Bestseller Mystery MAGAZINE

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THE DYING FALL

by HENRY WADE

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The Night of the Earthquake — Miriam Allen deFord

Weapon of Fear — Joseph Whitehill

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Bestseller Mystery MAGAZINE

July, 1959 *Including* MERCURY MYSTERY MAGAZINE

The Library of Distinctive Mystery Fiction

THE DYING FALL Henry Wade 4

Chief Constable Netterly looked upon Mrs. Rathlyn's death as an accident, and the investigation thereof as a pure formality. Detective Hant, however, his eyes not so dazzled by the wealth and good character of the dead woman's husband, was, it seemed, almost unreasonably suspicious. . . .

The Night of the Earthquake Miriam Allen deFord 108

When the earthquake came, the killer showed his true colors.

Weapon of Fear Joseph Whitehill 118

A murderer has many weapons to choose from, and one of the most terrible is fear . . .

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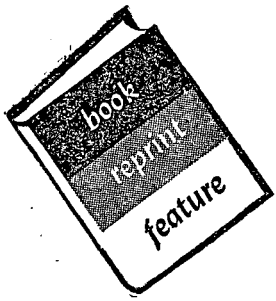

Charles Rathlyn was a sportsman whose luck ran in cycles. He lost his horse and everything he owned in the famed Royal Cup steeplechase; a few weeks later he had met and married a wealthy woman, and was leading a peacefully happy life. Then he met a girl who made him dangerously restive, and stirred his wife to a jealous rage. When his wife falls to a violent death, the stage is set for one of the most shocking climaxes in recent crime fiction.

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THE DYING FALL

by HENRY WADE

CHAPTER ONE

A FINE FEBRUARY DRIZZLE was drifting across the course as the numbers went up for the 1952 Royal Cup. Disappointing, because the day had begun fine and this might spoil visibility, blurring one's race-glasses and even veiling the far side of the course.

Still, the business of the moment was in the paddock, and to this were trooping now the hundreds of members and their friends for whom the Shankesbury 'Royal' was surpassed in importance and popularity only by the Grand National and the Cheltenham Gold Cup.

The owners were beginning to dribble in twos and threes into the parade ring, men and women, young and old, rich and . . . not so rich as they hoped they looked —the men mostly in bowler hats and wide-skirted overcoats or macintoshes, the women in every variety of turn-out, from well-worn tweeds to fur coat and high-heeled shoes; only a handful of them, compared to the men, but numbers seemed to be increasing year by year. Noticeable among them was Mrs. Waygold, owner of the favourite, Ballnaceach; and round her were a little group of men attracted by the glamour of expected success, by her by no means negligible charms, or by her reputation for riches and generosity. Mrs. Waygold's own attention, however, was on her horse, which had just come into the ring—a big, upstanding bay with powerful quarters and flat, sloping shoulders that looked well up to the task of carrying him and his rider at speed round the stiff three and a half miles of this great race.

Many eyes were upon Ballnaceach, as he walked sedately beside his stable-lad round the ring; he would start at something like three to one—short odds in a steeplechase with many runners of real quality—and he was carrying a lot of public money. But there were other well-backed horses, too, and among these was a beautifully made grey mare, No. 15, Silver Eagle, owned by Cap-

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tain Charles Rathlyn, which was to be ridden today by Dan Maston, one of the boldest and most successful jockeys riding under National Hunt Rules. This fact alone would have attracted public money, but Silver Eagle had her own good merits and had youth in her favour; she had not yet won a big race, but was generally thought to have been unlucky at Hurst Park earlier in the season.

Whatever public favour she had earned, however, the mare was carrying today what to her owner seemed his whole life. Charles Rathlyn, forty years old now, had held a regular commission in the 1st/27th Lancers, which had been 'converted' into armoured cars before 1939. He was a born horseman, with a passion for race-riding, and in the thirties he had been left a useful little fortune by an uncle. The young soldier had just begun to 'use' it, with good, or at any rate pleasant, effect, when Hitler's invasion of Poland put an end to all that.

Although no longer a horse-soldier, Charles had enjoyed his armoured-car scraps with the Germans in that hectic May of 1940, but his luck ended on the quay at Dunkirk, where his leg had been smashed by a bomb.

Discharged unfit, with a small disability pension, Charles found that he could no longer race. He could ride, but his stiff knee made him clumsy and unbalanced; he tried hunting, but he could not 'go' as he used to, and that to a thruster by nature is misery. His income, too, was greatly reduced by taxation; he had enough for comfort and one modest luxury, so he decided to concentrate on a small string of steeplechasers. He had no luck, however, and for three years had been going steadily downhill, almost to the point of selling his string and buying a farm. Then one lucky, or skilful, buy gave him fresh hope: Silver Eagle, bought as a three-year-old with no public reputation, suddenly developed into a first-rate chaser. Charles and his trainer, Fred Dartle, kept as quiet as possible about her—her failure at Hurst Park had helped them in that—so that she would start today, with a fine chance of winning, at a very fair price, and carrying, besides a good deal of 'cavalry' money, the whole, or nearly the whole, of Charles Rathlyn's remaining capital.

Dan Maston needed no last-minute instructions. He had ridden Silver Eagle in every race she had run in Charles's colours, and knew exactly what she could do and how to get the best out of her. Charles gave the little man a leg up, patted his knee and said:

"You're carrying my last button, Dan."

Maston nodded, touched his cap, and then joined the string of

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horses making their way out on to the course—a way quiet or lively, according to their respective temperaments. The roar of the crowd rose to a new pitch as they appeared, but it made no impression on Charles's accustomed ears; he detached himelf from Dartle and the other owners and made his way to the furthest, topmost corner of that section of the Members' stand which is reserved for owners.

He was joined almost at once by his old brother officer and lifelong friend, Gerald Fanthony, who had been feeling the book and executing one or two last-minute commissions. George had a half-interest in a moderate animal running in the last race, so he qualified for an owner's badge.

"She'll start at about sixes, I think, old man. I got a couple of hundred on at eights. Best I could do. A bit for myself too. I'm backing her on your judgment, you know, old man. I don't know all that much about the mare myself. I was out of the country when she ran last at Hurst Park; what happened? Did she fall?"

Charles shook his head. "No; she was knocked into just as she came to the last fence—unbalanced; she couldn't get going again in time."

"Oh, that was it. Well, I hope you're right about her; she's carrying a lot of money."

Again Charles nodded, but did not speak. His glasses were at his eyes now, bearing upon the bright patch of colour at the start.

The shouting had died down now and all eyes that could see were turned upon the wavering line of horses. At last the tape flew up, the white flag fell and the twenty horses sprang forward as if released by a catapult.

By the time the field had reached the far side of the course on the first time round, three horses were out in front—Larkaway, the second favourite, Hunter's Holler, and a horse he could not identify. Five or six lengths behind came Silver Eagle, just clear of Ballnaceach, followed by a bunch of eight others; three or four were tailed off, and the rest had fallen. Ballnaceach was jumping beautifully, seeming to gain a length over every fence, and then running smoothly on with the long, effortless stride that took so little out of him, heavily weighted though he was. Silver Eagle was doing all right too—definitely 'there', though not in the same class as Ballnaceach as a classic fencer. As the two approached the formidable open ditch Gerald thought that Maston was pushing the mare a bit, perhaps trying to hurry the bay out of his stride.

"Ahh!" There was a gasp all round the course as the grey brushed through the top of the big fence, sending a cloud of gorse flying. She did not come down,

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but the effort to recover balance took something out of her, and Ballnaceach, jumping perfectly, was now a clear length ahead as they approached the stand. Larkaway was still running on strongly, but Hunter's Holler and the other leader—now identified as Champerton—were beginning to tire; it was now evident that, barring accidents, there were only three horses in the race.

Charles' face was flushed, and behind his glasses his eyes were sparkling with excitement. He *knew* that Leddy was pressing the top-weight too soon; it was exactly what he had hoped; Leddy was afraid of Larkaway and had forgotten all about Silver Eagle. But—barring that blunder at the open ditch—the race was going exactly as he, Charles, had planned it with his trainer and Dan Matson; the mare was still fresh, and her lighter weight and superb turn of speed would take her to the front after they turned for home from the far side.

"Ahh!" Another gasp as Champerton toppled over. Hunter's Holler was dropping back now; Ballnaceach passed him; after the next fence Silver Eagle passed him too. The bay was drawing up to Larkaway, and the grey mare was within three lengths of the bay. Leddy had not looked behind him; his eyes were concentrated on Larkaway, when they were not on the fence ahead.

Four fences out Larkaway was beaten; Ballnaceach passed him on landing and still strode resolutely on, but he, too, was beginning to flag now and Leddy was riding him. Suddenly the bookmakers and the crowd realised what was happening.

Silver Eagle was closing up fast now; between the last two fences they raced side by side, both jockeys sitting still and concentrating all their thoughts, their experience, their skill on that last vital jump. Leddy knew that the young mare would have the legs of Ballnaceach in the run in; it was the jump that would give him his last chance. Three strides out he pushed his horse hard, gaining half a length as he came to his take-off, playing just the game that Maston had tried to play at the open ditch. Maston knew all about it now and did his utmost to steady Silver Eagle, but the mare was young, inexperienced, her blood was up; she jumped with Ballnaceach, jumped too big, pecked on landing and was nearly down. A superb effort by horse and rider kept them on their feet, but by the time they were going again Ballnaceach was three lengths clear.

The crowd was roaring now, roaring with excitement, the backers of Ballnaceach roaring with joy. The sound of it reached the ears of the two jockeys, each concentrating the whole of his con-

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scious being upon the last tremendous struggle which would carry one or the other to victory.

For the first time in their joint racing careers Dan Maston took the whip to the mare. He was riding her now for all he was worth, and Silver Eagle responded with everything she had. Over that last gruelling uphill furlong she slowly began to over-haul Balnaceach, crept up to his quarters . . . then, fifty yards from home, she faltered; Matson instantly dropped his hands, leaving Ballnaceach to sail past the post an easy winner by nearly two lengths.

On the top of the stand Charles Rathlyn slowly lowered his race-glasses. His face was deathly white, an expressionless mask. He stared straight in front of him across the course, seeing nothing, deaf to all sound. Only a tiny muscle twitching at the angle of his set jaw showed the intensity of his feelings. For a year or more he, with the help of his trainer, Fred Dartle, had played for this one stake, building up the mare—and the 'background' too—for this race, the Shankesbury Royal Cup. Charles did not know whether Dartle had backed the mare himself; it was a question he never asked and one on which the trainer kept his own counsel; but Charles himself, little by little, starting as soon as the book opened and spreading little 'packets' as widely and quietly as possible, had invested on Silver Eagle every penny that he could lay his hands on. It was only in the last few days that the mare's price had noticeably shortened; Charles had got most of his money on at really generous odds, and he had stood to win a small fortune—enough to keep him and his modest string going for a comfortable number of years ahead. Now all that was gone. How, even, he was going to live, on little more than his tiny disability pension, Charles had not attempted to consider; all his mind was concentrated on the dreadful thought that for him racing was over.

Gerald touched his friend on the elbow.

"Come and have a drink, old man," he said gruffly.

Charles nodded. Together they walked down to the bar and had a couple of stiff whiskies. Charles was not a heavy drinker and the spirit had an instant effect upon him, restoring some sense of proportion.

"Come and have a look at the mare," he said. "I ought to have come straight down and had a word with Dan; he rode a grand race."

They found the mare being rugged up, Dartle watching and lending an occasional hand, no expression on his lean, tight-lipped face. Maston had already gone off to change for another race.

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"No luck, Fred," said Charles, as cheerfully as he could manage. "No fault of yours; she was trained to the minute."

"Thank you, sir. It was just a bit of bad luck, I think; she was too game. I don't blame Maston."

"Oh, no; it was just one of those things."

For a time their attention was given to boxing the mare—she was travelling by road. Then, when the heavy ramp was up, Charles Rathlyn turned to his trainer.

"You must look out for a buyer, Fred—for her and the others."

For a moment the trainer's imperturbability was shaken; a look of real consternation appeared on his face.

"You don't mean it, sir? I . . . that's bad news indeed. But if it's necessary, wouldn't it be better to wait till she's won a nice race? She could hardly have run better than she did today, but buyers like a winner."

Charles shook his head.

"Better perhaps, but impossible. I'm clean broke. We'll go into details later, but you must take it as certain."

Dartle said no more, and presently Charles and Gerald strolled back to the paddock, where the horses for the next race were now parading. Suddenly they found themselves face to face with the victorious owner, flushed with success and perhaps just a glass too much champagne.

Kate Waygold gave Charles a brilliant smile, then quickly changed it to an understanding look of sympathy.

"That was real bad luck for you, Captain Rathlyn. I'm sorry; I am indeed. If it hadn't been for that peck she had us beat. You deserved to win."

Charles had only met Mrs. Waygold on casual occasions. He appreciated her friendliness and told her so. She was passing on, when suddenly she stopped and looked at him shrewdly.

"Forgive me if I'm talking out of turn," she said. "Little birds tell me this may have hit you hard. If you want to sell Silver Eagle I'll pay your price for her. Think it over."

Charles gasped.

"I . . . I hardly . . ."

"No need to answer now," she broke in. "Anyway, come down to Tandrings for the week-end and we'll try to cheer you up. Bring Major Fanthony, if he'd like to come."

CHAPTER TWO

KATE WAYGOLD was the daughter of a turf accountant, Joseph Hillburn, now defunct and more pertinently, the widow of Terence Waygold. Waygold, a 'playboy' in the modern expression, inheriting

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a large fortune from an American mother, had never needed to work, but spent his time and money amusing himself—owning a yacht, race-horses, and finally a beautiful young wife whom he could deck with pearls and precious stones and whom, to his own great surprise, he came to love with a complete devotion which lasted until he broke his neck out hunting the winter after his horse, Simon the Seventh, won the Gold Vase at Ascot.

That happened when Kate was in her early thirties and she, after a quick recovery from the shock, settled down to enjoy the astonishing wealth that her doting husband left to her, wealth that she enjoyed not only for the fun that it brought her but for the happiness that it could give to other people. For Kate Waygold was a generous woman, warm-hearted, equable, and at the same time shrewd enough not to be a prey to the sharks who flocked round her. With her husband's money she had inherited his stud and racing stable, even something of his genuine fondness for horses though she had always been a poor rider. She kept them on, and had had a fair measure of success with them, though it was generally thought that her trainer, Carter Casling, was a bit too clever for her.

At the time of Ballnaceach's victory at Shankesbury, Kate Waygold was forty-six and was still a handsome woman, though, in the parlance of her racing friends, she was carrying a bit too much weight. She had had many offers of marriage, but had preferred to retain her freedom, until she could find a man of kindness and courage for herself.

So, seeking for him, seeking but so far not finding, she kept open house at Tandrings, the lovely old Elizabethan house in Barryshire that Terry had bought just before he died.

It was to Tandrings, that Charles Rathlyn and his friend Gerald Fanthony came on that Friday evening in February, following the Shankesbury Royal Cup; driving down in Gerald's Lorte-Renton and arriving just in comfortable time for a whisky-and-soda and a bit of chit-chat with hostess and fellow guests before going up to dress for dinner.

Charles himself was still too shaken and worried about his own precarious position to notice much about his fellow guests. It was upon Kate Waygold that Rathlyn's interest was centred—his interest and his hope, almost his only hope. If she would pay him a really good price—'your price' she had called it, in the flush of her victory at Shankesbury—then there was still a chance for him to rebuild some sort of position for himself, though it must be a very modest one.

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Knowing something about the quality of Tandrings hospitality, Charles and Gerald Fanthony had both brought their hunting kit, hoping to be offered a mount. The meet, they had discovered, was at Eborn's Gorse, only a few miles away, and sure enough, horses were put at their disposal. Mrs. Waygold too was going, hoping to see something of Captain Rathlyn's performance across country, even though she knew that if hounds really ran she herself would soon be left behind.

Kate Waygold believed in hacking to the meet if it was within reasonable distance. It got her horse's back down and warmed her own blood before that chilly-moment at the covert-side which, with the timid, is such a test of three-o'clock-in-the morning courage. Today Charles Rathlyn made a point of riding beside her; his quick eye noted the clumsiness of her seat in the saddle, the nervousness with which she controlled her high-spirited horse, but nothing would have induced him to betray his knowledge.

"Will you pilot me, Mrs. Waygold?" he asked. "You know the country and I don't."

"You wouldn't see much of the hunt if you waited for me to pilot you," she said. "I'm no performer; I just like a ride and not too much jumping. Primrose will carry you at the top of the hunt, and there's no wire to worry about."

Rathlyn patted his mare's glossy neck.

"I'm sure she would, but I couldn't stay with her. You will have noticed that I've got a stiff knee; I'm no thruster now—balance gone and liable to fall off."

Kate Waygold felt a faint sense of disappointment. Still, she knew something about understatements, and hoped that this was one of them.

Rathlyn wanted to please Mrs. Waygold, and he sensed that she wanted him to be a credit to her and to the lovely chestnut mare she had provided for him, so when hounds ran he picked a line for himself and was soon oblivious to everything but the exhilaration of riding a perfect fencer over a good grass country and fair, unwired fences. It was a sharp burst of twenty minutes, and when hounds ran into their fox at the far side of the first bit of heavy plough, Charles, though not in the first flight, was not far behind.

He slipped off his mare, loosened his girth, and made much of her. A thin-faced man, with a hooked nose and dark moustache, riding a rather common-looking animal, clipped trace-high, trotted up to him and followed suit.

"That's a good one you've got there," he said. "Am I right in thinking she's from the Tandrings stables? I have followed you at a respectful distance and admired the performance."

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Rathlyn smiled.

"Her performance," he said. "Yes, you're quite right. Mrs. Waygold has kindly mounted me."

"I thought I recognised her—the mare. By the way, my name's Netterly."

"Mine's Rathlyn."

"What, the owner of Silver Eagle?"

Charles nodded, feeling gloomily that this might be the last time he could answer that question in the affirmative.

"A grand mare; it was wretched luck, that peck over the last fence; I thought she was a certain winner."

"I hope she didn't lose you a packet."

Netterly smiled and shook his head.

"As a matter of fact I don't bet, but I like watching a good race. Here's your hostess coming," he added.

Charles Rathlyn looked over his shoulder and saw Kate Waygold approaching. He walked to meet her, nodding farewell to his new acquaintance. Kate was looking flushed and handsome, and Charles smiled at her cheerfully.

"Thank you for a grand ride, Mrs. Waygold," he said. "I hope you enjoyed that hunt."

"I should think I did. I followed you for two or three fields, but I couldn't keep it up. I didn't see much sign of falling off."

Charles laughed.

"That was Primrose; she caught me the other side. She really is a lovely performer, so smooth and sure." Rathlyn rather laboriously clambered back into his own saddle.

So they followed hounds to covert, and when a fox went away, Rathlyn stayed with his hostess and piloted her on a very pleasant little hunt, not letting her scramble through the gaps made by other people but going his own line, picking easy places to jump and giving her plenty of time to catch up with him between fences. Plenty of confidence too; Kate Waygold enjoyed that little pottering hunt as she had never enjoyed a hunt before. They went home early, riding all the way and talking it all over. Charles was pleased with himself; he felt that he had sown some useful ground-bait. As for Kate Waygold, her eyes were sparkling as she lay and soaked in her hot mustard bath. She felt that she had found a man—and a man not entirely devoid of sympathy and understanding.

The other guests had enjoyed themselves too. Gerald Fanthony had had a smashing fall, and as his horse had not been hurt—a disaster with a loaned mount—he was at the top of his form, chaffing the ladies and drinking rather more Bollinger than was strictly good for him.

The following day, Sunday,

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Charles hardly had a word alone with Mrs. Waygold, and when she retired to her sitting-room after tea 'to write letters', he felt that his fondly cherished hopes had flopped. When a rubber of bridge was started he was unlucky enough to cut out, so was sitting in an armchair, gloomily looking through the papers again, when a footman appeared and asked if it would be convenient for him to go and see Mrs. Waygold. He jumped up from his chair with alacrity—from the bridge-table Gerald cocked an encouraging eyebrow at him—and followed the footman down a long passage.

The room in which Mrs. Waygold was waiting for him had been her husband's study or smoking-room.

Kate Waygold was standing by the fire. She was wearing a black cocktail frock of heavy silk that set off her fine figure to perfection.

Mrs. Waygold pointed to a tray containing a decanter of sherry, two glasses and a dish of salted almonds.

"Have I dragged you from a rubber?"

Charles smiled his attractive smile.

"As a matter of fact, no; but I should have needed no dragging."

He filled her a glass of sherry and helped himself. She sipped hers for a moment or two and seemed rather at a loss for words. Then she sank on to a leather sofa and patted the seat beside her.

"Captain Rathlyn," she said, "I don't know how you are situated, as they say, and perhaps I am talking quite out of turn. Forgive me if I am. I wondered whether you would consider becoming my racing manager."

Rathlyn's heart gave a bound. Nothing of this kind had entered his head. His thoughts raced and he was conscious—when he got them under control—of looking extremely foolish.

"I . . . I . . . hardly . . . I had no idea . . ." he stammered.

Mrs. Waygold checked him.

"Of course I don't expect an immediate answer," she said, "—unless you want to turn it down flat. If you care to hear, I will tell you something of what it would mean."

"Do please tell me. It sounds a wonderful idea."

Kate Waygold relaxed. She had not been at all sure that she would not be turned down flat. She finished her glass of sherry and held it out for more.

She was perfectly well aware that a prudent woman—a prudent owner of either sex—would have made a great many confidential enquiries before inviting a near-stranger to take on a post of so much responsibility, with so much money involved. But she had never been noted for prudence. She was impetuous, and enjoyed being impetuous. She had liked

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the way Charles Rathlyn took his beating at Shankesbury; she had liked the way he rode Primrose; and she had liked the way he had thanked her for the ride and then devoted the rest of the day to seeing that she enjoyed herself. He was not a moaner nor a boaster, and he clearly had more than the usual man's meagre share of unselfishness and thoughtfulness. So, without any enquiries worth speaking of—the idea had indeed flashed into her mind at Shankesbury and she had asked one or two casual questions of her friends—she invited him here and now to become her manager. Here and now he accepted.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NEXT YEAR, 1953, was on the whole a happy and successful one for Charles Rathlyn. By a stroke of great good fortune, a small house had recently come in to hand at the bottom of the park, and within a few weeks—thanks to the recent easing of the licensing restrictions—it had been sufficiently modernised and redecorated for him to move into it.

Picking up the threads of his work kept him fully occupied. He paid one visit to Jack Herris who cared for Waygold's racers at Lambourn and liked him. Herris was a man of few words and clear understanding. He did not question the appointment of a racing manager—that was entirely a matter for his employer—but he made perfectly clear to Rathlyn the line beyond which he would not welcome interference—a line, thought Charles, quite reasonably drawn.

Carter Casling, the steeplechase trainer, was another matter. Charles knew him of old and had never much liked him, though he had had no business dealings with him. Casling was an able and successful trainer of steeplechasers, but the plain hostility with which he greeted Captain Rathlyn's appointment made the latter wonder whether there was not some good reason for his objection to supervision. Kate Waybold admitted that she had allowed the trainer to do almost as he liked, had paid, without question, the formidable bills which from time to time came to her, and was now patting herself on the back at her cleverness in thinking up this brilliant idea of a manager. Charles Rathlyn had laughed at this.

"How do you know I am not just a bigger flea to bite you?" he asked.

Mrs. Waygold shook her head.

"I call myself a pretty good judge of a man," she said. "I trust you, and that's enough."

It had been arranged that Silver Eagle should remain with Dartle for the present. Mrs. Way-

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gold had bought her for a fair price—not quite the fancy price that Charles Rathlyn had had in mind, but fair enough. He drove over to see Dartle, explained the position to him, and settled on a plan for the rest of the season.

There was not much left of the hunting season by the time he was settled in his house. He had two more very pleasant rides on Primrose, one alone and one in company with his employer; then, as there were signs of an early spring, he advised Mrs. Waygold to sell two of the less satisfactory horses and to rough the rest off. When they had had a good rest and settled into their summer coats it would do them good to be hacked, if Mrs. Waygold cared to ride.

As soon as he was settled into his house and had begun almost daily discussions with Mrs. Waygold about her racing interests, Charles Rathlyn began to learn a bit more about the make-up of her establishment. The butler, Ludd, he had of course seen something of during his first week-end visit; he had been conscious, too, of a footman and of what seemed to him an almost pre-war ration of maids of various categories. Now he realised that there were three other people of greater importance than the domestic staff. The first was Mrs. Waygold's secretary, Philip Monner, a rather tall, thin man in the late thirties, bespectacled and with a quiet, good manner. Mrs. Waygold called him 'Philip', and Charles learned later that he was the son of a man, John Monner, who had been for many years clerk to Jo Hillburn but who had had a bad break and been sent to gaol for embezzlement. The bookmaker had had a soft spot for his old clerk and had had the son trained as a secretary and accountant—roughly the job that he was doing now for Jo Hillburn's daughter.

Then there was a young woman, called 'Isabel' by Mrs. Waygold and 'Miss Wey' by the staff, whom Charles had difficulty in placing; at first he thought she was Mrs. Waygold's maid, but later judged her to be a sort of *confidante,* or personal secretary. She was evidently about thirty, and was good-looking, except that her mouth was too thin and firm; a good figure, too, with dark hair parted in the middle and brushed back to an almost Victorian bun.

Finally, there was Mrs. Tass, the housekeeper, whom Charles did not meet in the flesh for months, though he soon realised that she was a power behind the throne. She had been Kate Hillburn's nanny, and still ruled Kate—as far as Kate was willing to be ruled—and not even Isabel Wey was free from fear of her.

When they were not overseeing the horses, racing, or visiting the stables at Lambourn and Ewcote,

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Kate Waygold and Charles Rathlyn spent a good deal of time riding—riding in the park or over the considerable Tandrings estate.

It was very pleasant riding about that lovely countryside in the spring and early summer. The horses which had been retained had been beautifully schooled and had perfect manners; they would stand quietly while gates were opened, stand, too, when their riders wanted to talk quietly to someone met by the way—a farmer, a labourer, a housewife on her way to the bus, the local bobby, the postman. Charles was good at this sort of friendly talk; people liked him and he seemed to like people. Kate Waygold felt more and more sure that she had at last found the man who could take Terry's place.

Gradually Charles began to realise what was happening. Free of the nagging anxiety of his dwindling income he was happy and able to enjoy life, even away from the excitement of a racecourse. He enjoyed these rides, he liked being with Kate Waygold; she was good company; her temperament was equable, and it was the rarest thing to hear her find fault with anyone—a very precious gift in a woman. Slowly, too, it dawned on him that she liked being with him, that she was not treating him just as an employee, that she was even rather fond of him. In public she called him 'Captain Rathlyn', but in private, especially on their rides, she had slipped into the habit of using his Christian name, though she did not invite him to call her 'Kate'.

So the summer passed, cheerfully for them both, and with growing hope and happiness for Kate Waybold. The weather, indeed, was cold and gloomy, but the Coronation spirit out-balanced that, and when the blue, white and gold colours flashed past the post in one of the richest races at Ascot there seemed no cloud on the horizon. By the time of Goodwood, Kate Waybold—now called in private Kate as she called him Charles—had made up her mind.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEY WERE MARRIED in the early autumn, and spent their honeymoon in the south of France.

Kate at once made over to her new husband the study that had been Terence Waygold's and that she herself had used, with memories of him all round her, during her widowhood. Now she swept all that away—the photographs, the paintings of his horses, the leopard-skin rug in front of the fire. Cut the past right out—that was her cool decision, taken without slight to Terry's memory. The

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room was redecorated, a new carpet on the floor, new curtains, new covers on the chairs—except those which were leather. This was to be Charles's now. She herself moved back into what a former age had called the boudoir—a bright and cheerful room that neither she nor Terry had ever much cared for.

There were plenty of rooms in Tandrings. Not only bedrooms but 'reception rooms'. In addition, Philip Monner had a room to work in, at his letters and accounts. Isabel Wey—Charles gathered—had two rooms somewhere at the end of a wing on the first floor; one as her bedroom, the other in which she worked. Just what that work was was a bit of a mystery. Apparently she did for Mrs. Rathlyn, a little washing, some of the finer 'make and mend' ironing, pressing; but she also seemed to attend to Kate's personal correspondence. She had a telephone up there and made appointments—'dates', perhaps, before this happy marriage put dates in inverted commas out of court. Charles was rather intrigued by this young woman's position in the household; it was, to say the least of it, unusual. And she was a far from usual type herself, with her quiet good looks, her assured manner, and her apparent lack of interest in anybody but herself.

Charles had wondered, too, as he had when he first came to Tandrings, what Philip Monner found to do with himself all day long. The estate was managed by a firm in the county town, Barryfield. Monner did not touch the racing side of his employer's interests; Isabel Wey dealt with her personal correspondence and engagements. What was left for Monner? He looked after Mrs. Rathlyn's financial affairs, certainly, and this apparently included dealing her out cash when she needed it. Charles had been rather shocked when he came to realise what a casual arrangement this seemed to be. Mrs. Waygold—as she still was when he first began to take notice—would say: "Philip, I want twenty pounds", or fifty or even a hundred, and Monner would retire to his office and return with the appropriate number of treasury notes. He must keep quite a supply of them, Charles thought.

Now that they were married, although he had no control over his wife's income or expenditure, Charles felt that some responsibility for her interests did rest on him. He broached the subject tentatively with her, and she just laughed at him and said that she trusted 'Philip' absolutely; besides, how could anything go wrong? She gave him a receipt for all the cash she had, it was properly entered in the accounts and these were audited every year.

No doubt quite all right, but

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Charles thought he would just sound Monner himself on the subject. So one day, when the secretary had brought him some letters to sign, he approached it on a side wind.

"Can you cash me a cheque any time, Monner?" he asked. "I see you provide my wife with cash fairly regularly."

"Oh, yes, sir; I expect I generally can, if it's not too large a one."

Charles laughed.

"That's hardly likely. How do you manage it? She seems to ask for cash at any old time and for any amount. Do you have to keep a lot of bullion?"

The secretary's thin face, generally so expressionless, softened into a smile.

"It's not quite as unpredictable as all that, sir. Every month, or more often if necessary, Mrs. Rathlyn signs a cheque for a hundred or perhaps two hundred pounds, according to her likely requirements, taking any balance into account. I cash the cheque and keep the money in my safe; as she needs it she asks for it. I keep an account of course, and each month submit it to her for signature."

"Do you mean in detail? What it is wanted for or spent on?"

"Oh no, sir; I wouldn't know that. Just 'cash' and the date and amount."

Charles would have liked to question this casual arrangement more closely, but he did not like to give the impression that he was doubting the man's honesty. Perhaps Monner noticed his hesitation, because he went on of his own accord.

"Mrs. Rathlyn keeps a copy of each month's account and I keep another. At the end of the year these are, of course, checked by the auditors with the bank statement. They are quite satisfied, except that they did suggest that it would be better if Mrs. Rathlyn signed for each amount received; we did that for a time . . ." he hesitated, and again the slow, pleasant smile lifted the corners of his mouth; ". . . I think Mrs. Rathlyn found it rather irksome. She said it was a bore, and the arrangement, so far as a receipt for each amount was concerned, petered out."

"Sounds all right to me. And you can let me have a pound or two now and then? Good. I don't know what my wife would have done without you all these years; you are quite invaluable to her. Only thing is . . . don't you get bored with this small-time work? I know you've got good technical qualifications—accountancy especially. Haven't you ever felt that you ought to be doing more important work?"

Charles thought that there was some slight stiffening of the secretary's manner.

"During the war, sir, I worked

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for the Ministry of Supply, and I believe they would have kept me on. But Mrs. Waygold asked me to come back. I owe everything to her and to her father, Mr. Hillburn. You may not know, sir, that my father was sent to prison. We had no money after that, and there would have been no chance of my being trained for a profession if Mr. Hillburn had not seen me through it all. When he died Mrs. Waygold—Mrs. Rathlyn—took me on. I feel that it would be the basest ingratitude if I didn't stay with her as long as I can be of any help."

It was refreshing. But did it ring true? Was it not, perhaps, just laziness—the liking for a soft, presumably well-paid job? Oh well, it was no business of his, thought Charles, as he walked out to the stables and had a talk with Ben Penny, the head groom, about the horses that he and Mrs. Raythlyn would ride the following day.

As it happened, this was the last time that Charles and his wife were to hunt together for some time. Kate had developed some sort of pain in her back, which was accentuated by the screw-wise action of riding side-saddle.

He had persuaded Kate to take on Primrose for herself and had sent the mare, before the hunting season started, to be schooled to side saddle—with complete success. He himself rode either Robin, a well-mannered brown horse, a good fencer but rather slow, or Dashalong, one of his own steeplechasers now touched in the wind and retired to the hunting stables. Of the two he greatly preferred Dashalong, a big-hearted bay who lived up to his name.

Charles and Kate seldom took out second horses. They did not like long days: Kate because of her weight (and clumsiness) and latterly her back; Charles because his stiff knee, unbalancing him as it inevitably did, made riding and jumping a much more exhausting business than it is to an able-bodied man. That was one reason why they had reduced the number of their horses to four. Now, with Kate not hunting, it would be a job to keep those four adequately exercised. Charles looked about for someone who might like an occasional hunt on one or other of them. Especially on Primrose; only a good one must ride her, and if possible it should be side-saddle, so as to keep her accustomed to it.

There was one girl who came into his mind at once in this connection. Her name was Anne Faery, and she was the daughter of a Captain Faery who was a horse-dealer in a fair way of business. She was a slim, pleasant looking girl, but it was her riding that had caught Charles's eye. She had the quiet, assured seat and the light hands of a first-class per-

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former; she rode her father's horses to show them to customers and had the priceless quality—from the dealer's angle—of being able to make even a flashy, chancy six-year-old look a safe, well-mannered hunter. Normally she rode astride, but Charles had seen her ride side-saddle, and she appeared to be the very person for Primrose—till Kate was ready to ride again. It would have to be a business arrangement, of course; if she rode Primrose she would be no use to her father that day.

That was how it worked out. Captain Faery said that he would spare her one day a week, at so-much a day; that would still leave her free to ride his young hunters three other days a week, if needed.

Gradually he got into the way of riding much of the time with Anne Faery, allowing her sometimes to pilot him over country that he did not know well. He found that it was all he could do to keep her in sight if hounds really ran. It did not occur to him that she sometimes eased her horse in order that she should remain in sight. He liked her. She was a nice girl, quiet, modest, no nonsense. On the days when she rode Primrose they hacked home together, and that is always a pleasant end to a day's hunting. It was perhaps as well that Charles Rathlyn was, as he had declared, 'not interested in girls'.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mr. Jorrocks was accustomed to tell his admiring audiences that 'a fall is an awful thing'. As a generalisation that was, perhaps, an overstatement, but it is a fact that a hunting fall can be most unpleasant and have lasting consequences not anticipated at the time of the incident.

On a Wednesday in January, when Anne Faery was riding Primrose and Charles Dashalong, there had been no scent in the morning and no hunt worthy of the name. Primrose was a bit above herself and they were anxious that she should have a good gallop, so they stayed on into the afternoon, and were rewarded—as they thought—when hounds pushed a fox out of a small spinney and went away to a great cry. The day had warmed and scent was suddenly good, so that the pace was a fast one and Primrose got her gallop. This time Anne let her go, and Charles found that even Dashalong had difficulty in keeping up with her. Fortunately the going was not heavy, so his touched wind did not greatly worry him; the timber was what caused the trouble. As long as he was close up to Primrose he followed her gallantly over post and rail, as well as laid fence, but a moment came when she was out of sight, and there before them

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was a hairy bullfinch with just one gap filled by a really big bit of solid timber over which Primrose, with her light-weight rider, must have gone. Charles hesitated, and his hesitation probably conveyed itself to his horse; he put him at it, and Dashalong, too, checked in his stride, rose half-heartedly and crashed into the top rail. It broke, but only just, and the horse turned slowly over and came down on its rider, pinning him to the ground.

The heaviness of the fall knocked the wind out of both horse and man; fortunately, perhaps, because Dashalong did not roll, but when he had recovered his breath, rose carefully to his feet and stood looking down at his prostrate rider. Charles continued to lie still; he was not 'out', but his senses were whirling and he was only conscious of a severe pain that he had not located. Presently he was aware of a hand on his shoulder and, opening his eyes saw, mistily at first, a small face under a velvet cap. It was Anne Faery.

"Are you hurt, Captain Rathlyn?"

A stab of pain shot through Charles and he located it now as in his damaged knee. He closed his eyes again and found himself thinking that there had been a note of anxiety in the girl's voice.

Charles pulled himself together and began to raise himself. Immediately a hand pressed him firmly back and a man's voice said:

"Lie quite still."

The voice was vaguely familiar, and when the speaker moved round into his field of vision, Charles saw that it was the man with whom he had talked at the end of that first hunt that he had with the Barrymore. What was the name? Hatterly? Netterly?

"I'm quite all right," Charles said. "The old boy just chose to lie on my groggy knee; probably torn a ligament. I can manage quite all right."

"Half a minute."

Netterly knelt down beside him, ran his hands expertly down his ribs, over his collar-bones, down his spine, down each leg. Gently he moved the left leg, and another stab of pain shot through the knee. Charles drew in his breath sharply.

"Felt that all right; good. Wiggle your toes? That's fine. I don't think there's much damage, but you had a very heavy fall, and that's a shock. I told someone to telephone for an ambulance as soon as I saw the fall; it will be here quite soon. Just lie still" Netterly left, to meet the ambulance and for a moment he thought he was alone. Then Anne Faery stood beside him.

"I was just tying up Primrose. She had been standing like a lamb, talking to Dashalong. But

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when he went off she naturally wanted to go with him."

She sat down on the grass beside Charles.

"I say, don't do that. The grass is soaking."

The girl laughed.

"I'm accustomed to getting wet."

"But you must go on; you'll lose the hunt. It was terribly good of you to come back, Anne, but I'm really quite all right."

It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name, but she did not seem to notice.

"I heard the crash of that timber; it was terrific. When you did not appear I guessed what had happened and came back. You looked rather bad."

Anne's face was still a bit white, but the anxiety had cleared from it. She talked quietly, largely to keep him quiet; it was soothing, pleasant—he began to feel sleepy. Presently there was the sound of footsteps—his ear, close to the ground, picked them up even on the soft going—and Netterly reappeared, accompanied by a man in blue, carrying a stretcher over his shoulder. Expertly they shifted Charles on to it, carried him slowly across the fields, slid him into the light ambulance. He was tucked up in blankets and a hot-water bottle put between his knees. Anne climbed in too and sat down on a seat close to him; the back was shut.

"He hasn't brought an orderly, so I'm coming along too—just in case."

"You really shouldn't bother. I ought to have thanked that chap. Who is he?"

"Colonel Netterly? Oh, he's the . . . what *is* it? . . . Chief Constable. I don't really know him, but I think that's right."

"Oh. No wonder he's efficient. Good of him to bother, though. I say, Anne, are you all right? It's awfully cold in here."

Anne leaned forward and touched his hands, which were outside the blanket. They were icy cold, and she thought he looked rather blue round the mouth. Shock, of course. There ought to have been another hot-water bottle. She left her warm hands on his and gradually the chill left them and he seemed to doze off.

Colonel Netterly had completed his efficient job by ringing up Tandrings and telling Mrs. Rathlyn what had happened, advising her to get the doctor to look over her husband, though there was probably not much wrong. When the ambulance reached Tandrings she was waiting for them, evidently in a good deal of a fuss.

Dr. Jennerel had ordained that Charles should stay in bed, have a good dinner and later take something to make him sleep. Kate knew that Isabel Wey had

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some Dormonal tablets, as she suffered from insomnia. The doctor had pricked up his ears at that, declared that Miss Wey was not his patient but that Dormonal would do provided that not more than two—repeat two—were taken.

Charles disliked the idea, but did as he was told, and by ten o'clock was in a deep sleep. When he woke he felt heavy and his knee was throbbing. The room was in darkness but yet not quite dark; he realised that the door was open and a faint light was coming through it. He put out his hand and found that Kate was not beside him.

The luminous hands of his watch showed that it was half-past two. He began to doze, woke again with a start and saw that ten minutes had passed. Kate was still not there. Where on earth could she be? Then a sound outside caught his ear—a footstep; she was coming back, wherever she had been. But she did not come into the room, and again a footstep, perhaps on a loose board, sounded as far away as before. Charles began to feel worried; he slipped out of bed and hobbled painfully to the door. What he saw made his heart miss a beat.

The main staircase at Tandrings rises from the hall in a noble sweep and reaches a landing and a gallery which runs round three sides of the 'well' so formed. A low balustrade, of beautifully worked iron with oaken handrail, guards—rather inadequately—this gallery. Charles now saw that his wife, in her nightgown only, was walking quietly up and down the gallery, her fingers just touching the handrail and re-seeking it each time she turned.

Something about her appearance frightened Charles; she was staring straight in front of her, her face expressionless; when he moved forward out of the doorway, though she was coming towards him at the time, she did not look at him. With a shock he realised that she was asleep.

Charles did not know what to do. He had heard, or read, that it was dangerous to wake a sleep-walker. And yet . . .

With a gasp of relief he saw her turn the corner of the gallery and walk towards the door of their room. He stole back into it and she followed him in, shutting the door quietly behind her. It was quite dark in the room now and he could only tell of her movement by the sound; he heard the bed creak under her weight and crept into it himself, lay there quietly, listening to her untroubled breathing. Presently he slipped out of bed again, locked the door, and put the key under his pillow.

In the morning he was awakened by his wife shaking him.

"Charles! Did you lock the

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door? Have you got the key? Alice can't get in."

Ashamed of himself for oversleeping, Charles produced the key, muttering: "Tell you later". Kate unlocked the door and got back into bed, while the young housemaid brought in the tea, drew back the curtains and, after what seemed an age of fiddling about the room, withdrew.

"Well, what on earth?" Kate was staring at him.

"My dear, I think you were walking in your sleep last night."

Kate's face cleared.

"Oh, that," she said; "I've done that all my life—or so I'm told. Not much since I grew up—which was lucky, because it's apt to lead to misunderstanding," she added with a laugh. "What did I do?"

"You walked up and down that gallery outside there."

Kate stared at him.

"What on earth did I do that for?"

"I don't know, dear; but it scared the life out of me."

Kate's eyes softened.

"Did it, darling? Bless you; that's sweet of you."

CHAPTER SIX

CHARLES COULD not take that sleep-walking as lightly as Kate appeared to.

"Who else knows about this?"

"Oh, no one except Nannie Tass."

"Mrs. Tass? Your housekeeper?"

"Yes; she was my Nannie, you know."

"But Dr. Jennerel; doesn't he know?"

"Oh no; there has never been any need to tell him. It's not an illness, you know; just a sort of trick."

Charles was not so sure of that. He was silent for a time, then asked:

"Does nobody else in your present household know? Are you sure? Isabel Wey, for instance?"

Kate looked at him sharply.

"Certainly not. Why should she? Why do you ask about her?"

Charles hesitated.

"Kate, what exactly is Isabel? I can't make out if she's a maid or a secretary or what."

Kate laughed.

"I suppose it is rather a vague arrangement," she said. "She was my maid for five or six years. Somehow I never could get into the way of calling a maid—a lady's maid—by her sur-name, which is the proper thing to do. Something in it really, I expect, because the relationship is rather close . . . rather intimate; one is liable, perhaps, to get on too familiar terms. Perhaps that was what happened with me and Isabel; I got very fond of her, and I got into the way of letting her do all

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sorts of things for me, till she gradually became what she is now —more of a secretary, really. The rest of the staff don't like it, of course; Philip, in particular, hates it. He thinks he ought to be my personal as well as my business secretary, but I should never like that. I trust him, but he's terribly strait-laced; I should always feel he was disapproving of me."

Kate checked herself and looked at Charles.

"Not now, darling, of course; nothing he could disapprove of now that I'm a respectable married woman again."

They laughed, and the subject was changed, but Charles was not quite easy in his mind.

The damage to Charles's knee had not proved serious and he was soon about again, but Dr. Jennerel had advised him not to ride for a month or so—certainly not to hunt. That was disappointing, in a way—a way which Charles was careful not to examine very closely.

It occurred to Kate that it would do them both good to have a glimpse of sunshine and some fun in the south of France—at Cap St. Baise, where they had spent their honeymoon.

It was lovely at St. Baise. The sun shone warmly, there were amusing people to talk to, plenty to drink, delicious food, cards, roulette; money proved to be no problem.

Kate enjoyed every moment of it. She was deeply in love with her husband, in love with being in love again at forty-six, no—forty-seven now.

She told him that it appeared to her right that the bulk of her late husband's money should remain in, or rather return to, his family. Most of it would go to Terry's brother, George Waygold, as residuary legatee; he was not really much of a chap, but he was a Waygold. She hoped Charles would understand what she felt about that. But Charles himself would have her horses, both hunters and racehorses, and some capital.

"Not much, Charlie dear, but you will be comfortable and you will be able to keep my colours flying."

Charles winced. He hated diminutives—Charlie, Katie, Annie; they set his teeth on edge. But he was grateful for Kate's consideration, for her generosity. As for what might come to him if he survived her, that hardly need be thought about now; there is no reason to worry about death when one is still in the forties, it seemed to him.

What did worry him was that Kate was drinking a good deal; not, he thought, because she was unhappy or needed stimulant, but from habit, perhaps inherited habit. And out here, in the brittle gaiety of this, to him, unnatural

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life, she was matching the gaiety —and that largely meant the alcohol consumption—of those about her.

Charles Rathlyn found himself thinking more and more often of the happy days he had spent hunting in the early part of the winter; the open-air life, the exhilaration of a good gallop, of fences cleanly jumped. He thought of the girl who had hunted with him, so young and slim, so simple and unaffected. With bitter doubt Charles began to wonder whether his old friend Gerry Fanthony had not been right.

But the fortnight ended, and with infinite relief Charles found himself back in the cold, damp atmosphere of hunting England. He decided that he must pull himself together, pull the marriage together—and that meant doing something about Kate and her drinking. The result was their first quarrel. Charles had tried to approach the matter with delicacy and tact, but those feeble flowers wilted before the anger of a shocked and offended woman. Nobody had ever before suggested to Kate that she should mind or mend her ways; it had never occurred to her that she was drinking too much; that such a thing should now be said to her by . . .

They made up their quarrel. Kate even admitted that there might be something, not much, in what Charles had said. Secretly, she had a good look at herself in the glass, and was shocked and frightened by what she saw there. Was she getting *old*? Might she even be in danger of losing Charles's love? Not being a very clever woman, she reacted by loading him still further with her affection. But their relations were never quite the same again; there was no longer complete trust.

Charles's knee was now quite all right again—as right as it ever would be. He could not resist the temptation to have another hunt or two before the season ended, if only for the sake of Dashalong and Robin.

When he told Kate that he was going to hunt again she was not at all pleased. Surely, she said, it was silly to risk damaging himself again so late in the season; why not wait till next season, when she hoped to accompany him? He spoke about Dashalong and Robin, not mentioning Anne. On the Tuesday night she suddenly asked about Primrose, and he was obliged to tell her that, as arranged a long time ago, the mare was hunted every Wednesday by Anne Faery; yes, presumably she would be going tomorrow. The meet was some way off and Penny was boxing the horses over; he would either himself go in the horse-box or follow in the small car.

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Kate said no more, but Charles noticed her expression freeze up, her mouth set in a sullen line. When morning came he dressed early, went out to the stables and settled with Ben the details of where the box would meet him; he had decided to go himself by car. Then he went in to breakfast, and was just finishing his porridge when the door opened and Kate came in. To his astonishment, she was in her hunting habit and stock, a thin yellow cardigan over her silk shirt. She looked extremely handsome. But Charles was not thinking of her looks; as he stared his thoughts raced.

"My dear! Are you . . . are you coming?"

She flashed him a brilliant smile.

"Looks like it, darling. Are you pleased?"

He took a quick pull at himself.

"Of course I am; I'm delighted. But . . . you haven't ridden for so long; ought you to start with a hunt?"

"Oh I shan't stay out long. I shall be sure that you don't stay too long either."

"Well, that's grand. I'd better just ring through and warn Anne Faery that she won't be wanted."

By some unlucky chance the Faery telephone was out of order that morning, so Charles had to drive his wife to the meet knowing that Anne would be there, expecting a hunt on Primrose. Although it was a business arrangement, he felt that she might be disappointed. Sure enough, near the cross-roads a mile from the meet, where several horse-boxes, including that from Tandrings, were waiting, there was the little Morris with Anne sitting by herself at the driving-wheel. Charles drove his car well past it, stopped near the horse-box and walked back towards the Morris. Anne did not notice him until he came up and bent down to the window; he saw her face light up with welcome, but he checked her as she opened the door.

"Anne, I'm so sorry—don't get out. It's off, our hunt together. My wife is going to ride Primrose."

"Oh!"

The smile faded from her face.

"Oh, I am sorry. But, of course, that's splendid—that Mrs. Rathlyn is going to hunt again."

Charles felt his own disappointment deepen; deepen to something like misery.

"Anne, I am so disappointed."

She did not answer, but bent her head to pick up a glove. He saw a glint of tears, and in a flash he knew what had happened; to his mingled consternation and joy he realised that he was in love. He longed to take the girl in his arms and tell her so, but it was impossible for him to do that—wrong, in any case, and especially impossible here, in public, with her sitting in a car and him out-

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side it. He slipped his arm through the window, put his hand on hers and squeezed it gently. Then he turned away and walked back towards the horse-box. As he went, he heard the self-starter of her car and then the car moving off, the sound dwindling into the distance.

Kate was already in the saddle when he got back; she moved off without waiting for him, and he did not catch up with her till they were approaching the meet. Then she smiled brightly at him and broke into a chatter of one-sided conversation, presently greeting others at the meet with quite unusual gaiety.

Hounds drew blank at the first covert and there was a long hack to the next—a big wood which took a long time to draw. Charles had remained punctiliously beside his wife throughout, and now she suddenly turned to him and said:

"Oh, Charles, this is such a bore and my back's hurting. Let's go home."

He looked at her in astonishment.

"But . . . the horses have had no sort of exercise. Primrose is all right, of course; she's been hunted regularly and she's got manners. But old Dashalong is mad fresh," Charles explained.

It was true enough. The big bay horse had been on his toes ever since Charles mounted him. Now, suddenly, there was a long blast on the horn and the field was instantly in motion. Dashalong sprang away with the rest and Charles could not check him; he could only fling a 'Come along' over his shoulder. He managed to pick an easy place at the first fence, but he could not slow his horse; when at last he was able to do so and looked round, Kate and Primrose were nowhere to be seen. He waited, with Dashalong fighting for his head; then one of the tailenders lumbering past called out to him: "Looking for your wife? She's gone back on to the road. She's all right." And he was gone.

With a shrug of the shoulders Charles Rathlyn let Dashalong have his head and they galloped on after the receding hunt. When it was over—a point of two or three miles—he rode slowly back to where they left the box. It was there, with Primrose already inside; their car, with Kate, was gone. He did not question the groom but, boxing up, himself drove the heavy vehicle home. He knew that he must apologise for going on alone, and he wanted to get it done before going up to have his bath. Ludd told him that Mrs. Rathlyn was in her sitting-room.

Kate had already changed into a cocktail frock, much smarter than she usually wore on such occasions. She was heavily made up,

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and even across the room Charles was conscious of a heady, exotic scent. She was on the sofa, with her feet up, but when he came in she swung them to the floor and walked briskly across the room to the fire.

"I'm so sorry, dear . . ." he began.

She swung round on him, her eyes blazing with anger.

"What the hell do you mean leaving me alone like that? I know what sort of a game you have been playing; I saw you with that little——"

Charles stood aghast, as his wife poured out a stream of abuse and accusation against him, against Anne, using language that he had never heard her use before—dating back, perhaps subconsciously, to the early original Jo Hillburn. At first he tried to check her, but for a full minute she went on, screaming at him, fury in her voice and eyes. Then suddenly she stopped with a stunned gasp.

"Oh darling, don't look at me like that! Oh, what have I been saying? Oh, forgive me, darling." She flung her arms round his neck. "Oh, love me, Charlie, love me! I've got no one in the world but you."

Charles put his arms round her and gently patted her shoulder, but the expression on his face, as he looked past her, was hard and grim.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NOTHING SEEMED to go right for them now. Silver Eagle fell at the third fence in the Royal Cup, and in the National Ballnaceach was knocked over by a loose horse at the 'Chair', second time round, with only one in front of him. That would have been all in the game if they had been in reasonably good spirits, but Kate was moody and irritable and Charles was not helping her. He had seen nothing of Anne since that last hunt, except for a few minutes in front of a thousand eyes at Shankesbury, when they could speak to each other only as casual friends.

Then came another blow; Jack Herris, Kate's trainer, suddenly died, within a few days of the opening of the flat-race season. Neither Kate nor Charles liked what they knew of the man who was taking over the establishment, and Charles had to go to Newmarket to interview a couple of trainers whom they had in mind, then to London for business with Weatherbys, with a bank, a solicitor—and he might as well see the osteopath who had done a good deal for his knee in the past.

On the way through London Charles suddenly had an idea. He had the Faerys' telephone number in his diary and, ringing up, he got through to Anne.

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"Anne, this is Charles Rathlyn. Look, I've got to be in London for a few days—I'm there now. Would you care to come up and do a show. I know you've got an aunt in Chelsea or somewhere."

He heard a little gasp of surprise; there was a moment's pause and then:

"Oh, yes; yes, I'd like to, Captain Rathlyn. I've got to come up and get some summer clothes, anyhow. We've about finished roughing off."

They fixed it up and Charles rang off, his heart feeling ridiculously light and with scarcely a twinge upon his conscience. After all, there was the convenient aunt in Chelsea.

When the evening came he collected her from Cheyne Row, took her to a 'musical' and then to the Berkeley, where they had supper and danced. Dancing with featherweight Anne was a very different business from the tugging round that he had had to do at Cap St. Baise. In her semi-evening dress she looked lovely, thought poor Charles, who had hardly thought of her looks before. They were happy together, said nothing to one another that might not have been said before a thousand ears, and when he deposited her on her aunt's doorstep at a not unreasonable hour she thanked him as any girl would thank a man older than herself who has given her a pleasant evening. He held her hand, perhaps, just two seconds longer than was necessary, and when she turned away to unlock the door he felt such a wave of longing surge over him that it was all he could do not to spring forward and take her in his arms. A moment later, with a final wave of the hand, she disappeared and the door was gently closed.

As he walked away, lonely and miserable, he cursed himself for his folly in linking himself to a woman he did not love. Nothing but misery could be ahead now—misery for himself, misery—he feared—for Kate.

So Charles's thoughts flogged on, as he strode down the King's Road and eventually picked up a homing taxi to take him to his club. He spent a restless night, and on the morrow returned to Tandrings, to tell Kate what he had arranged about her horses and to try and counterfeit pleasure in being with her again. He tried his best, but from now on his impersonation of a happy married man did not ring true. Kate sensed it soon enough, and her unhappiness drove her to accentuate everything that he most disliked—her cloying affection, her drinking, her bursts of suspicion and jealousy. Quickly the breach widened, till everyone in the household must have been aware of it; even the normally unimaginative Gerry, down for a week-end before Ascot, saw that something

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was badly wrong, but had not the heart to question his friend.

The weeks passed, Goodwood came and went, the anniversary of their wedding day approached (could it really be only a year?). Kate had talked again of the South of France. She had not attempted to ride again during the summer and he had not encouraged her to. She even thought of selling her race-horses. Why should they not make a complete break? While they were young enough, why not travel, see the world, perhaps stay for a year in New Zealand . . . ?

Listening, Charles felt the blood congeal in his veins. He knew it was exactly what was needed, the one thing that might break his infatuation for Anne, save his marriage with Kate . . . he could not face it. Winter was coming; the hunting season would be on them in a month or two—cub-hunting was here now. Even though he was sure that Kate would not again agree to Anne riding Primrose, Anne would be out, riding her father's horses. He would see her every time he hunted himself; Kate could not stop him doing that, however much she might try. No, by God, she couldn't. . . .

One day late in September Kate told him that her brother-in-law, George Waygold, was coming for the weekend. This, Charles knew, was the brother-in-law, her only one, to whom Kate was willing back the bulk of her late husband's estate. He felt some curiosity to see the man. Kate's description of him was frank and uncomplimentary.

"George is just a wet," she said. "He's never done a thing worth doing in his life—not even get married and raise a family. The old man—their father—had such a poor opinion of him that he left everything to Terry and asked him just to keep George out of the workhouse. Terry was very generous to him in his lifetime, and though he left most of his money to me, he did leave George enough to keep him in reasonable comfort. He hoped that George might some day marry and settle down."

He came on the Friday evening—it was 24th September, to be exact—and after a day walking up partridges on the Saturday retired with Kate to her sitting-room after tea. While they were dressing for dinner—Kate liked Charles to leave the connecting door to his dressing-room open so that they could gossip—she told him that it was the usual story.

"Poor old George is in trouble again. He will play poker; fancies himself at it, and of course he's just a pigeon. They rook him. You've only got to look at him to see that. Now he's given out a lot of I.O.U.s and I shall have to pay

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them off—can't let the name of Waygold stink at——whatever the club is that he plays at. But Charles, dear, there's something good coming out of it, I believe. One of these friends he plays with —a very rich man, he says—has got a yacht, and he's arranging a Mediterranean cruise this autumn —all over the Mediterranean, just strolling about, he calls it; perhaps going even further than that if they feel like it. George believes he could get us invited. We might have to pay some of the expenses; that would be only reasonable, as we don't know the man. It's just exactly what I've always wanted to do—and now especially, just as we've been talking about it. If I pay George's debts . . ."

Charles had only listened with half an ear at first, but soon his fingers dropped from the tie that he was tying and he stood in front of the mirror, staring at his own white, set face.

Isabel Wey was sleeping badly that night—Sunday night, the 26th September, a date she was not likely to forget. She often slept badly and, as Kate Rathlyn had told Dr. Jennerel, she had a bottle of Dormonal tablets, prescribed for her by her landlady's doctor when she was on holiday, which usually did the trick.

This Sunday night she woke at three o'clock, and after ten restless minutes switched on her light, reached out for her book . . . then with an ejaculation of annoyance remembered that she had finished it before turning out her light. There was another she was interested in—Hartley's latest —down in Philip Monner's office, in which, by one of the odd arrangements in this unusual household, she had her supper in company with him and sat afterwards if she felt inclined. With a shrug of annoyance she rolled out of bed, put on dressing-gown and slippers and went out into the passage. The shortest way for her was down the back stairs, but . . . Isabel did not often use the front stairs and it sometimes amused her to do so—pandered to her imagination—when it could be done with no one to criticise her. No one would see her, criticise her, at three o'clock in the morning; there would be no need to switch on lights—that light in the hall was always burning. She walked along the passage from her room, seeing the dim light ahead; came out on to the gallery above the hall. Suddenly she noticed that the door of Mrs. Rathlyn's bedroom was open. She checked, drawing back; then some instinct made her steal forward and look over the balustrade.

What she saw made her heart bound; she shrank back, then stole forward again and peeped

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cautiously down into the hall. A man was kneeling there, almost below her but not quite, a man in pajamas; it was Captain Rathlyn. He was bending over something on the floor—a heap of something—of clothes? Isabel knew quite well what it was; it was the body of his wife.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHARLES RATHLYN withdrew his hand from his wife's heart, stood up and, after a moment's hesitation, walked to the telephone which stood on a table near one of the big windows. Presently Isabel Wey, crouching on the landing, could hear his voice, curt but calm.

"That you, doctor? This is Charles Rathlyn. Could you come over to Tandrings at once, please? My wife has had a fall and she is very seriously hurt; I think her neck is broken, or her back. Yes, I am afraid so. Thank you very much. No, I won't try to move her till you come."

He rang off. Then he walked across to the fireplace and pressed the bell, in a series of long bursts; it rang in the pantry and Ludd, a bachelor, slept in a snug little room next door. Looking down at him, Isabel could not see his face clearly; it was white but expressionless. After what seemed an age but was probably little more than a minute, Ludd appeared, in trousers and dressing-gown. He looked at Captain Rathlyn, who said quietly:

"Ludd, I'm sorry to say that your mistress has had a very serious accident."

He walked back to where his wife lay, and Ludd gasped in horror as he saw the still body on the floor.

"Oh, sir! Is she . . . should we try and carry her up to her bed, sir?"

Charles shook his head.

"If she is alive it might do her serious harm to move her, inexpertly. Help me put these rugs round her—very gently. I have sent for Dr. Jennerel. He may want some help."

"Shall I call Mr. George, sir?"

"Good God, no. Go and wake Miss Wey and tell her to get dressed. If the doctor wants her we will send for her. Then bring me my dressing-gown and slippers."

Isabel slid back from the balustrade, behind which she had been crouching; silently she sped back down the passage, slipped into bed and turned out the light. She lay there in darkness, her heart pounding; then presently Ludd's measured footsteps and a knock on her door.

"Miss Wey! Miss Wey!! Are you awake?"

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Isabel lay still. The door opened a crack.

"Miss Wey! Oh, Miss Wey, the Captain says will you please get dressed and be ready to come down if wanted? Mrs. Rathlyn has had an accident and the doctor is coming."

Isabel switched on her reading lamp, nodded to Ludd, who closed the door and padded off down the passage. Shivering with excitement, Isabel slid out of bed and began to dress.

Down in the hall Charles Rathlyn was standing by the empty fireplace, his hands deep in the pockets of his dressing-gown. He wanted desperately to smoke a cigarette, to drink a strong whisky and soda, but he refrained. Presently there was the sound of a car outside and Charles opened the dront door, admitting Dr. Jennerel. The tubby little man, usually so cheerful, had drawn a mask of solemnity over his face. He walked across to the body of Kate Rathlyn and, kneeling down, made his examination. When he had finished he joined Charles, who was now sitting on the club fender, in front of the empty fireplace. He sat down, too, and put his hand on Charles's shoulder.

"I think I needn't tell you that she is gone," he said gently. "Tell me about it."

Charles continued to stare at the stone floor in front of him, covered here by a Persian rug.

"You didn't know about her sleep-walking, did you?"

"Sleep-walking? Mrs. Wayg . . . Mrs. Rathlyn?"

Charles nodded. He told of what had happened on the night of his hunting accident eight months ago, of what his wife had told him, and Mrs. Tass.

"Didn't know a thing about it. And that happened again tonight?"

"Yes. I woke up and found her gone, and when I went out on to the landing she was leaning over the balustrade. I don't know whether she heard me, or whether she woke up, but she suddenly seemed to slip and then toppled over."

Charles Rathlyn shuddered.

"The sound of the fall was awful. I shall never forget it."

Dr. Jennerel patted the shoulder on which his hand rested.

"You should have told me—I might have been able to help her."

"She wouldn't let me. She said . . . she didn't want what she called a fuss. I let her persuade me."

"Yes. Well, there it is. They don't often hurt themselves, but sometimes it happens—like this."

He stood up, paced once or twice across the hall, then sat down again.

"You know, Rathlyn, that there will have to be an inquest; that's inevitable. It would have been

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easier if I had known about the sleep-walking. I shall have to ring up the police. I think it will be better if I get straight on to Colonel Netterly—the Chief Constable—now. He will have to know at once, and you don't want that fat fool Sergeant Danding blundering round with his silly questions."

Colonel John Netterly was one of the last of the old-fashioned type of Chief Constable; a regular soldier—an ex-gunner—who had had a spell of police experience in India and had been selected by the Barryshire Standing Joint Committee as their Chief Constable directly after the close of the Second World War. He was now fifty-three years old, had a quiet manner, and was generally liked and respected in the county. As Charles Rathlyn had noticed when he first met him out hunting, he was middle-sized, thin, and had a hooked nose and dark moustache. He had his own ideas about police-work and had done a good deal to bring the Barryshire force up to date since he joined it, including the development of a C.I.D. branch of its own.

The chief Constable offered his sincere condolences and explained why it was necessary for the police to appear in the matter.

"There has to be a formal enquiry when any sudden, accidental death takes place. The Coroner, of course, holds the enquiry, but the police have to provide him with whatever evidence he considers necessary. We shall do our best to make it as little distressing as possible for you, Rathlyn, but I am sure that, as an old soldier, you will know the sort of thing that has to be done."

Charles nodded.

He went out and returned with the two police officers, one in uniform and one in plain clothes.

"This is Superintendent Binnerton," he said, indicating the uniformed man, "and this Superintendent Hant. If I may, I will leave them here now and return later in the morning. Binnerton will want a word with you, doctor; no doubt Captain Rathlyn won't mind if he takes you first, and then you can get away. You've got your car, of course? Is there some room my officers can use, Rathlyn? I don't want to monopolise your study."

So the solemn business of routine questioning went on—in Charles's study because that, after all, caused least inconvenience to the household and had a telephone. Superintendent Binnerton did the questioning, and if it turned out that 'routine' was all that was necessary, the case would remain in his capable and experienced hands. He was the Superintendent in charge of the Division in which Tandrings lay.

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The man in plain clothes was, in fact, Detective-Superintendent Hant, head of the C.I.D. of Barryshire, working directly under the Chief Constable. Colonel Netterly had not mentioned that word 'detective' when introducing him; it had an ugly, ominous ring which he wanted to spare the bereaved man if it proved reasonably possible to spare him. But Hant should be there, using his ears—and his very observant pair of eyes.

Dr. Jennerel told Superintendent Binnerton that Mrs. Rathlyn's neck was certainly broken and that that was presumably the cause of death. There was also a fracture of the skull. Neither man thought it necessary to enlarge on that answer at the moment; Binnerton knew well that the experienced doctor would make quite sure that the fall and the broken neck were not just a cover for some other form of death; he would also look for marks which might indicate violence before the fall. The police have an uncomfortable habit of not taking things at their face value; Dr. Jennerel knew all about that.

"This sleep-walking, doctor; I understand you mentioned something about that to the Chief on the phone."

"I did. You mustn't take what I say as evidence. Captain Rathlyn told me this morning that he had found his wife walking in her sleep some months ago—in January, I think; it was the night after he had a bad fall out hunting. He thinks she must have been doing the same thing tonight."

"You think that possible, doctor? That she fell while sleep-walking, I mean."

Jennerel hesitated.

"It's possible, certainly," he said. "I suppose one must say that that is probably what happened. On the other hand, it does rather surprise me; people who walk in their sleep are generally very sure-footed, well-balanced—their physical balance is good, I mean. I should have expected her to walk along a passage, up or down stairs, without stumbling."

"This previous sleep-walking in January; you were told about this at the time, I suppose?"

"No," said Dr. Jennerel curtly.

Both policemen stiffened slightly, as a pointer stiffens when it becomes aware of the presence of game.

"No, doctor?"

"Not a thing. Never heard a word about it, either then, or previously."

"Isn't that . . . rather surprising?"

Jennerel hesitated.

"Again, I don't know that I can go as far as that. I did show some surprise to Captain Rathlyn when he told me about it tonight, but he said his wife had refused to let him tell me at the time—didn't want what she called a fuss." The

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doctor gave a rather angry snort, as if fuss was a word that should not have been applied to himself. "Perhaps natural," he added more graciously.

"Anyone else know about it, sir?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. Only heard about it myself an hour or so ago."

Binnerton glanced at his colleague, who shook his head.

"Won't keep you any longer, sir. We'll send the body along to the hospital mortuary at once."

CHAPTER NINE

As soon as the body had been moved from the hall the two police officers returned to the study and word was sent by Ludd, asking if Captain Rathlyn could make it convenient to come there.

Neither of the police officers had met Captain Rathlyn before this melancholy occasion, and Superintendent Binnerton, at any rate, liked what he saw of him now. Charles Rathlyn was at this time nearly forty-two years old; his dark hair was slightly tinged with grey and his face was weather-beaten and lined, but the complexion was clean and his grey eyes steady and clear. At the moment he was, naturally, looking haggard, but at times he showed an attractive smile. Superintendent Hant, who was to see more of him, came to realise that he could look hard if circumstances were difficult for him.

Gently led by the kindly Binnerton, Charles repeated the story he had already told Dr. Jennerel.

"Would you and Mrs. Rathlyn have been alone in the house last night, sir?" Binnerton asked. "Apart, that is, from the staff?

"Yes—oh no, there was Mr. George Waygold. Good Lord! I had forgotten all about him. I must . . ."

He looked at his watch and found that the time was still long before George Waygold's normal hour of rising.

"I must go and tell him as soon as you've done with me. Shouldn't like him to hear of it from the servants."

"A relation of the late Mr. Waygold, sir?"

"Yes; his younger brother."

"Is Mr. George Waygold the heir to the estate now, sir?" he asked.

Charles Rathlyn looked at him directly for the first time.

"Yes, I understand that is so," he said.

Hant thought that he would venture just one step further.

"Does that mean that Mr. George Waygold would be the sole legatee?"

"I couldn't possibly answer that, Superintendent. I have not seen my wife's will. She told me that

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she intended to leave the horses to me, including her race-horces, and some money so that I could keep her colours flying. That was her expression. But that is all I know."

Hant pressed the point no further, and soon afterwards Superintendent Binnerton released Charles so that he might go and break the news to his guest. The uniformed officer looked enquiringly at his colleague, but all Hant said was:

"That will bear looking into."

Ludd was next questioned, but was unable to throw any light on the tragedy.

Mrs. Tass, summoned next, was clearly not well pleased. She was, naturally, greatly distressed at the death of her mistress, whom she had served faithfully for so many years. But she had complete control of herself and her emotions, telling the police officers exactly what she had previously told Captain Rathlyn. She knew nothing of the circumstances of this night.

It was, in fact, night no longer, and the morning sun was shining brightly in at the study window when Isabel Wey came into the room. Superintendent Hant, respectable married man as he was, had some difficulty in suppressing a whistle when he saw the newcomer. Though he did not know it, Isabel was in fact looking quite a new woman; her figure was always trim and attractive to the eye, but now there was colour in her normally pale cheek and a spark in the eyes that were wont to be dull. Her mouth too—usually, by reason of its thinness, her worst feature—had an upward tilt at the corners. She gave the impression of a woman who was enjoying herself.

Binnerton, older and less impressionable than his colleague, motioned her courteously to a chair.

"A sad day for you, I'm afraid, Miss Wey," he said. "I understand that you stood in a sort of confidential capacity to the late Mrs. Rathlyn."

"I was her personal secretary."

"Exactly. You would know a good deal about her affairs. Any cause of worry, that you know of?"

"Worry?"

Isabel's dark eyebrows rose in what she believed to be the correct curve of surprise.

"I will be frank with you, Miss Wey. We know, of course, that there is a history of sleep-walking—you know of that, by the way?"

A slow smile tilted the corner of Isabel's mouth.

"Oh, that! Well, yes; I suppose I do, though I'm not supposed to. I did once see Mrs. Waygold—as she was then—walking down a passage in the middle of the night. I . . . well, I thought . . . you know. I didn't say anything, of course; but she must have known I had seen her, because she told

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me she had been walking in her sleep. Told me not to say anything to anyone."

"I asked you that, Miss Wey, because of course we have to clear up all possible explanations. I mean, I asked you about worries for that reason. We have to be quite sure that Mrs. Rathlyn did not take her own life."

For a moment Isabel Wey appeared to be taken aback. She quickly recovered herself.

"Oh no; I know of nothing that would make her do such a thing," she said firmly.

"No money worries? No; I suppose not. No personal worries? Got on well with her husband?"

"Oh yes. They have only been married a year, you know."

"Then you would yourself reject the idea of suicide?"

"I certainly would."

"Or anything else? Murder, for instance?"

It was Hant speaking, abruptly—a method he had been taught to believe was often effective with a 'cagey' witness. Isabel Wey looked quickly towards him. There was no smile on her face now; indeed, a little of the colour seemed to have left it. She answered quietly and firmly:

"That seems to me impossible."

They did not keep her any longer, but the suspicious Hant tucked away in one of his pigeon-holes the notion that she might be concealing something.

Philip Monner was formally questioned, without any fresh evidence or idea emerging, except the name of Mrs. Rathlyn's solicitor, and then an invitation was sent to the presumed heir, the surviving Waygold.

George entered the room looking rather shaky and bearing with him a spirituous aroma not normally associated with breakfast. The early September sunlight was in his eyes, which watered slightly and did not inspire confidence. He nodded to the uniformed Superintendent and sat down in an armchair, taking a cigarette from a packet of ten and lighting it, with a hand that trembled slightly. Binnerton said his condolence piece and asked if Mr. Waygold had heard or seen anything of the tragic happenings of the night.

"Not a thing. Slept like a top—head spinning a bit, you know." George gave a feeble grin, presumably in support of a time-honoured jest.

"The first you knew of it was . . . when?"

George Waygold glanced at his watch.

"Some damned early hour. Charles came and told me—woke me up, to be exact. Shock—hell of a shock it was."

"Have you ever heard that your sister-in-law was in the habit of sleep-walking?"

George stared.

"Never a word. Mind you, I

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haven't seen much of her in recent years—not since poor old Terry—my brother—died. Doubt if he'd have told me either—not the sort of thing you'd want to tell people about your wife."

Binnerton thought he would get no further on this line. He sounded Mr. Waygold cautiously about his 'expectations' and at once realised that he had touched a nerve. Here was something in which the surviving Waygold really was interested; he denied knowing anything or having any idea as to whether he might expect to benefit by his sister-in-law's will. He did know that his brother had left her the whole of his estate absolutely—not just a life interest. He said nothing about the object of his visit to Tandrings.

That completed the immediate police enquiry, and as they drove back to headquarters in Barryfield they reviewed what they had learned and exchanged their impressions of the several witnesses. Binnerton had formed a definitely favourable opinion of Charles Rathlyn and believed that he had been telling the truth in all he said. He regarded Miss Wey as a sly hussy but doubted if she knew anything more than she had told. George Waygold struck him as a poor fish, quite incapable of any action requiring initiative or courage.

On the latter point Hant agreed and also, in the main, about Isabel Wey, though he reserved judgment about her 'whole truthfulness.' He, too, had liked the look of Charles Rathlyn, but he thought him a man quite capable of decisive and possibly unscrupulous action; he had a very definite note about the dead-pan expression of his face when asked a difficult question.

"I'd like to put that gentleman through a really tight bit of questioning—on the spot," he said. "Get him to show me just exactly where he stood and she stood and how she fell. But that would be showing our hand; I take it we'll need authority from the Chief to go that far."

Binnerton nodded.

"I see no harm in your going and having a word with the lady's solicitor. May tell you something, may not. No harm, as I say, in trying. Can't do much more till we get the P.M. report from Dr. Jennerel."

The *post-mortem* examination had, in fact, been carried out by Dr. Lane-Fallick, the chief police surgeon. Dr. Jennerel had, of course, been present, and both doctors came together to see the Chief Constable late in the afternoon.

The immediate cause of death had been a fracture of the spinal cord in the upper vertebrae of the neck, but there was also a severe fracture of the skull with laceration of the brain, which would

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have been in itself sufficient to cause death. There was heavy bruising on the right arm and leg, but no sign of any other recent injury, no bruising to suggest a blow to cause unconsciousness, no poison or narcotic in the stomach. In fact, nothing to suggest that the death had been other than accidental.

The Chief Constable asked one question:

"Could the fractured skull possibly have been caused by a terrific whack on the side of the head with some heavy, blunt instrument?"

Dr. Lane-Fallick smiled.

"Could have, perhaps, but she must have hit that stone floor a 'terrific whack;' whoever hit her one with a blunt instrument would have to be pretty clever to guess which side of her would hit the floor. It wouldn't have done, you know, to have a smashed skull on *both* sides of the head."

CHAPTER TEN

DETECTIVE-SUPERINTENDENT Willis Hant was a man of striking but not entirely prepossessing appearance. He was short, square and strong, with heavy black eyebrows, hooked nose and rather full lips. Colonel Netterly had promoted him to his present important post about a year previously; he had done so hopefully, because of the man's excellent brain and admirable record in the County's C.I.D., but also with a slight feeling of doubt—which still persisted. Superintendent Hant was sure of himself—perhaps a little too sure, a little too off-hand with his superiors and his peers. He was generally right, but he needed to be right if he were to get away with that manner.

At the time of Mrs. Charles Rathlyn's death Hant was forty-five years old—eight years younger than the Divisional Superintendent with whom he was now working. Binnerton was a mild, good-natured man, not easily ruffled, who respected his colleague's brain and overlooked his occasionally off-hand manner. He felt no jealousy, and his advice to Hant that he should go and interview Mr. Hume Lorriner, Mrs. Rathlyn's solicitor, had been given with a genuine intention to be helpful. Hant seized on it, with little acknowledgment, and promptly put it into effect.

Mr. Lorriner was a young man, somewhere in the mid-thirties, ambitious, anxious to stand well with the police—and indeed with all men and women who might bring grist to his professional mill. He listened to Superintendent Hant's enquiry, gave it careful consideration, and decided that his duty to his client did not in this

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instance compel him to withhold information from the police. He was not prepared to hand Mrs. Rathlyn's will to Superintendent Hant for inspection, but he would give him an outline of the main provisions.

An annuity of three hundred pounds a year, free of tax, was accorded to 'my life-long friend' Amelia Victoria Tass; one hundred a year, similarly tax free, to Ben Penny, groom; a legacy of five hundred pounds each, free of duty, to Philip Monner and Isabel Wey. 'To my dear husband, Charles Rathlyn,' was left a legacy of eighty thousand pounds, free of duty, "together with my race-horses, including steeplechasers, and other horses'; the residue of the estate to George Waygold. Mrs. Rathlyn also expressed the hope that if her executors found it necessary to sell Tandrings in order to raise additional capital with which to pay the legacies they would not do so for at least one year, in order that her husband might have ample time in which to make his future plans.

"Does that leave much for Mr. George Waygold, sir?" he asked.

Hume Lorriner smiled.

"You've grasped the point," he said. "Not nearly as much as the residuary legatee will probably expect at first hearing. Still, it is, even now, a very large estate, and I expect there might be something like a hundred thousand pounds coming to Mr. Waygold when all is cleared up. That is a guess, of course, and you must not count on it. It is also strictly confidential."

Superintendent Hant nodded. He promised himself that he would do one or two calculations when he got home—he was fond of mathematical problems. At a mere shot he estimated that the gross estate on which duty would have to be paid must be somewhere in the nature of six or seven hundred thousand pounds. The particular point that interested him now was, of course, the size of duty-free legacy to Captain Charles Rathlyn. What was it that the Captain had said about his expectations? 'The horses and some money to keep her colours flying'; that was a bit of an understatement, to put it mildly. Had he not known? Or had Captain Rathlyn been deliberately misleading him, in order to minimise a possible motive for murder? Hant's heart had quickened its beat as he thought of all the implications of what Mr. Lorriner had just told him. But here was the solicitor with another bit of information.

"I don't know whether you know, Superintendent, that I was out at Tandrings this morning."

Hant shook his head. Why should that interest him? Naturally the solicitor would have many duties to attend to over such a tragic event.

"I went there," continued Mr.

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Lorriner, "not because of Mrs. Rathlyn's death, which I did not hear about till my arrival—and a pretty grim shock it was—but because she wrote and asked me to come."

Had the solicitor something up his sleeve? He seemed to be hinting at something of significance.

"A long-standing engagement, sir?"

"She wrote yesterday—Sunday afternoon post—asking me to come at eleven o'clock this morning. She said she wanted to discuss her will."

Yes; significant enough, this sudden and imperious demand for attendance—especially on such a subject. The solicitor knew no more, but clearly he was intrigued; Hant wondered whether it was this that had made him so willing to divulge information. As the detective walked back to headquarters he pondered over what he had learnt and decided that the Chief Constable must be gingered into turning on the heat.

Detective Superintendent Hant arrived at headquarters and promptly asked for an interview. Netterly called him into his office and also sent for Superintendent Binnerton from the police-station next door; although the work on this case—if it was a case—would now fall mostly to the detective, Netterly always saw to it that the Divisional Superintendent concerned was kept in the picture.

The two older officers listened carefully to what Hant had to tell them. The detective was rather disappointed that no particular excitement was noticeable on his chief's face when he gave details of the large sums of money which Captain Rathlyn and various others were to inherit.

"That's very interesting, Mr. Hant," said Colonel Netterly. "I'm rather surprised that Mr. Lorriner told you all that so promptly. Congatulations."

"I think there may have been a reason for that, sir," said Hant modestly, and went on to tell of Mrs. Rathlyn's summons to her solicitor. This certainly did appear to ring a bell.

"We must try and find out something more about that, Hant. Captain Rathlyn may know something about it, or the secretary."

"The man or the woman, sir?" Hant explained—as far as he understood it—the dual secretarial position of Philip Monner and Isabel Wey.

"The man, surely. Anyway, try him first—unless you get all you want from Captain Rathlyn."

"I'd like to turn the heat on there a bit, sir, if you'll allow me."

"On Captain Rathlyn? Why, exactly?"

"A.1 opportunity, sir; obvious motive—as I've just discovered."

"Yes; but why suspect murder?" asked Colonel Netterly quietly. "I agree that we must clear up all

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possible alternatives, as I have just explained to the Coroner, but surely accident is much the most likely answer."

Superintendent Hant's black brows drew together.

"There's a lot more I'd like to know about before I'd be satisfied to accept that," he said doggedly.

"I suggest then, that you go over to Tandrings tomorrow," Netterly said, "and see if you can find out anything more about Mrs. Rathlyn's letter to Mr. Lorriner. Somebody—most probably Captain Rathlyn—may well know why she suddenly took it into her head to want him at such short notice. Then—if we still feel we ought to look further—we will wait till the inquest has been adjourned, and that will give us a better excuse for asking more pertinent questions."

So Hant went to Tandrings next morning and, finding that Captain Rathlyn was over at Ewcote, asked to be allowed a word with Mr. Monner. The secretary, silent and rather solemn in manner, took Hant to his own office and offered him a cigarette, which the detective declined. Monner sat down at his desk, after waving Hant to a chair beside it. He waited for the detective to speak.

"There is just one point the Chief Constable wanted me to find out about, if possible, Mr. Monner. You were Mrs. Rathlyn's secretary, and it seems likely that you may be able to help. It appears that Mrs. Rathlyn sent a letter to her solicitor, Mr. Lorriner, asking him to come and see her yesterday morning; the letter was dated Sunday. Would you have written that for her, Mr. Monner?"

"No," said Monner bitterly. "If it was a confidential letter it would have been written by Miss Wey, if not by Mrs. Rathlyn. Miss Wey did all Mrs. Rathlyn's confidential work."

Hant was aware of a coldness in Monner's voice; he sensed that there was no love lost between the two secretaries, but that did not appear to be a matter that he need concern himself about.

"You don't perhaps know, then, what it was that Mrs. Rathlyn wanted to see her solicitor about? It appeared to be a rather urgent summons."

"I don't know anything about it, Superintendent. Hadn't you better ask Miss Wey, if you want to know?"

Hant agreed and asked how he might best get hold of her.

"I'll ask her to come down here; you can have this room to yourselves."

A few minutes later Miss Wey appeared. Hant still thought her an attractive young person, but her mouth certainly did appear rather thin and hard. She sank into an armchair and, as Monner had done, waited for the detective to speak. Hant repeated his

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tentative approach, but Miss Wey shook her head.

"I didn't write it, or hear anything about it."

"But you did know a good deal about her affairs?"

"Perhaps I did. I didn't know about this."

"This might be rather important, Miss Wey. As Mr. Binnerton told you, we have to take all possibilities into account. I won't beat about the bush; what I want to ask you is whether you know of any reason why Mrs. Rathlyn might have wanted to alter her will?"

"Was that what she wanted to see Lorriner about?" asked the girl sharply.

"It's just a guess of mine—sort of thing people do send for their solicitors in a hurry for. Do you know of any reason?"

Isabel Wey looked at him thoughtfully. She seemed to be hesitating, but she shook her head and declared that she knew nothing about it. At that moment there was the sound of a car outside and then a voice, apparently in the hall.

"That's Captain Rathlyn; you had better ask him."

So presently Hant found himself back in the study, facing a tired-looking but apparently quite friendly Charles. After the usual offer and refusal of drink or smoke, Hant got to work.

"The Coroner will require rather more information upon one point we touched on yesterday, sir—your wife's testamentary intentions. You told us yesterday that Mr. George Waygold was the heir to the estate but that you yourself were to receive a legacy. Do you . . .?"

Charles Rathlyn interrupted him.

"I told you that I understood that; I don't know it for a fact. My wife told me so about six months ago; she may have changed her mind, for all I know."

"Have you any reason to suppose she did?" asked Hant sharply.

"None whatever."

"Did you know that Mrs. Rathlyn had sent for her solicitor to come here yesterday? Wrote on Sunday."

Charles showed no great interest in this. He smiled.

"Keep this to yourself if you can, Mr. Hant," he said. "My wife did tell me that her brother-in-law had come to try and get some money out of her. He's got some gambling debts—I've had them myself before now. She might have wanted to see Lorriner about that."

It appeared a reasonable explanation—to anyone who did not know that Mrs. Rathlyn had mentioned her will. Alternatively, this man might be trying to point the finger of suspicion at another man.

"Have you any idea how much

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Mr. Waygold would inherit?"

"Not the very foggiest. Not by several rows of noughts. It's a big estate, but the death duties will be crippling."

"And you yourself, Captain Rathlyn?"

"I have no idea."

"I'm sorry to press you, sir. Of course, I know nothing, but would such a sum as fifty thousand pounds be the sort of thing?"

"It might be. How can I say?"

"It wouldn't surprise you?"

"It's a lot of money. But, Superintendent, I told you that my wife wanted me to keep her horses in training. How much do you think it costs to keep a string of twenty at Lambourn, as well as half a dozen chasers? All that lot, of course, would be out of the question, but even half of them? And what would be my net income on fifty thousand capital?—say about twelve hundred pounds. Even if I could earn the whole of my own living—and I don't know how—it's going to be no easy job."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

KATE HAD NOT MIXED MUCH with her neighbours or taken interest in local affairs—Women's Institute and so on—so not many people had been much interested in her—except the shop-keepers, who valued her custom. Her death had not, therefore, caused much popular excitement, so no great disappointment was felt when the coroner, Mr. Purde, after taking only formal evidence, adjourned his enquiry for a fortnight. He gave his certificate for burial, so the funeral was arranged for Thursday, in the little, untidy churchyard a stone's throw from the Tandrings stables.

When the funeral was over the few mourners returned to the house and refreshed themselves on the generous fare provided by Mrs. Tass. They then departed and Charles and George Waygold were left alone—save for Mr. Lorriner. There was no old-fashioned reading of the will, but the solicitor took each legatee aside and gave him an outline of what was to be expected. He was careful to pipe down very thoroughly the residue which George Waygold might look for, but he undertook to provide at once a sufficient sum to clear George of his 'debts of honour.' Having done this, Lorriner saw such of the minor characters as he could find—Philip Monner, Isabel Wey, Ludd—but Mrs. Tass was too distressed to receive him, and Ben Penny was occupied with the vet and a sick horse.

Charles took himself off to his study and sat down to think out his position. The eighty thousand pounds was a much larger sum

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than he had expected, in spite of what he had said about the cost of keeping horses in training, but having done the same sums as Hant, he realised that his future would not be free from care. He would do his best—register Kate's colours in his own name and keep a handful of 'chasers, if nothing more; he was not deeply interested in the flat, especially if . . . ah yes, everything turned on that . . . if Anne would have him, life would be wonderful and nothing should stand in the way of their happiness.

Charles's own solicitor was in London, so the following day, Friday, Charles went up to see him and to discuss his own plans. He had already met the executors of his wife's will—Mr. Lorriner and a representative of her bank's trustee department; they had told him that while it would naturally take a considerable time to settle the affairs of so large an estate, it was not likely that they would be able to avoid selling Tandrings and obviously the time to do that would be the beginning of the following summer. Charles felt that he would probably have six months in which to form his future plans and look round for a new and more modest home . . . and possibly for a job. His solicitor advised him to seek that job in the one sphere in which he had some expert knowledge—horse-racing; the manager of the former Mrs. Waygold's racing interests would surely be able to find similar employment, even though on a smaller scale.

In the meantime there were some stiffish fences to be crossed; he was under no delusion about that. The courteous questions of Colonel Netterly and Superintendent Binnerton had not blinded him to the fact that they were clearly going to satisfy themselves about the circumstances of Kate's death.

On Saturday morning, the day after his visit to London, Charles was sitting in his study, pondering these things in his heart, when Philip Monner came in and asked if he might speak to him on a private matter.

"Of course, Philip; sit down; have a cigarette."

Charles noticed that the secretary's hand was trembling slightly as he lit his cigarette. Chap's nervous, he thought; what's it about?

"I am not quite sure how I stand, sir. I have never experienced . . . never lost my employer by death before. Am I in your employ now, sir? Or Mr. Waygold's? Just for the moment, I mean; until I have been given notice and so on."

Somehow, that point had not occurred to Charles.

"Oh, mine, surely; I don't think Mr. Waygold succeeds to any human chattels. What are you thinking of doing?"

"That's really just what I want-

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ed to ask you about, sir. Is there any chance of your retaining me in your employment?"

"Oh, my dear chap, surely you must do better for yourself now. You will have no difficulty, I am sure, in finding just what you want in the way of a job. But don't hurry over it. I shall probably be here for the next six months, and you can stay with me—in my employment, I mean—as long as you like till I go. Give you time to pick and choose."

"That is very good of you, sir; very good indeed."

Charles hoped the man would go now; he had made the position quite clear; there was nothing more to discuss. But Philip Monner sat on.

"Cheer up, Philip," he said. "We'll get you a job. Oh, by the way, what about Miss Wey? I suppose for the moment she is in my service too." He laughed. "Well, no one will expect me to keep two secretaries. I can make my own personal dates."

Charles spoke in jest, but he noticed that Philip Monner's face had hardened; Charles realised—as Hant had noticed before him—there was no love lost between these two. Oh well, plain jealousy would account for that, so far at any rate as the man was concerned. How uncomfortable, though, it must have been for them, having their meals together. He wondered that his wife had seemed quite unaware of this.

Better settle this up at once; no time like the present. He told Monner to ask Miss Wey to come and see him. Charles had always felt slightly intrigued about Isabel Wey. She was a girl—a woman; he supposed she must be best part of thirty—of considerable personality. Just how she had come into such closely confidential relations with Kate, Charles hardly knew, but he guessed that it might have been loneliness on his wife's part—loneliness after her husband died and before he himself came into her life. Isabel was certainly attractive to look at; she had a lovely figure, her eyes were large and well lashed and her dark hair, parted in the middle, had a slight natural wave.

Charles looked at her now, as she came into the room, and again was conscious of her attractiveness. He had thought her sullen, her mouth hard and thin; it was not so now; indeed, she looked rather demure as she stood quietly half-way between the door and his desk. Charles felt slightly uncomfortable; he did not quite know how to carry off this interview.

"Sit down a minute, Isabel. We have hardly had a chance to talk since this dreadful thing happened. You will be wanting to get off to another post, of course, and I want you to feel quite free to do that when you like. Of course,

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you are entitled to proper notice; what would it be—a month?"

"I don't think there was ever anything said about that, Captain Rathlyn. I was paid monthly."

Charles realised that he had no idea what she was paid. Philip Monner would know.

"Well, that at least. I have just been telling Mr. Monner that as long as I am here—probably six months—he can stay till he has found just what he wants. But naturally you will not want or need to stay long. You will have no difficulty at all about finding a new post."

"Is Mr. Monner leaving?"

"Oh yes, of course. He must get something much more interesting. In any case, I should have no need for an accountant; I'm going to be a poor man again."

Charles saw a smile flicker into the dark eyes.

"If Mr. Monner is leaving will you not need someone else to be your secretary? I am not trained as he is, but I have picked up a lot by experience."

"Do you mean . . . that you would like to stay with me?"

Charles was suddenly conscious of a little flutter of excitement. Quickly he crushed it down. What on earth was he thinking about?

"That's very nice of you, Isabel; but I won't need a secretary."

Isabel rose to her feet.

"Very well, then, Captain Rathlyn; I will begin to look around. It will certainly be a help if I may have a little time. I have no home to go to."

Again Charles's heart softened, as it had with Philip. He did not like to think of the girl being homeless, with no one to help and advise her. She must have come to look upon Kate as a friend, perhaps almost as a mother.

"There is no hurry at all. As I say, any time in the next six months. But you are going to be awfully bored."

Again that flicker of a smile.

"I don't think I shall be that, Captain Rathlyn," Isabel said, and left the room.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Detective-Superintendent Hant thought that a decent interval of about two days should be allowed after the funeral before renewing his enquiries about the accident. It was on Saturday morning, therefore, shortly before mid-day, that he arrived at Tandrings, accompanied by a young detective-sergeant with a camera. He met Captain Rathlyn just on his way out to the stables, having completed his talks with the two secretaries. Hant apologised for troubling him.

"Just one or two matters I shall have to clear up for the Coroner, sir; a photograph or two—you won't mind, I'm sure. I've brought Sergeant Knott along."

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"Of course, take what you like. You won't want me, I suppose?" Charles said.

"Not if you would just show me first the exact positions, sir." Hant explained that he wanted to see just where Mrs. Rathlyn had been standing when she fell, where Captain Rathlyn himself had been, and so on. Charles turned abruptly back into the house and led the way upstairs. Standing in the door of the bedroom occupied by himself and his wife he said:

"This was where I was when I saw her. I checked at once, so as not to startle her, but at that moment, as I told you, she seemed to overbalance—she was leaning over the balustrade when I saw her—and fell straight down."

"And she was standing . . . just where, sir?"

Charles walked a few feet along the gallery and put his hand on the rail of the balustrade.

"About here, as far as I can judge."

Hant looked down into the hall. He could not see from here the small chalk marks which he had made on the floor, indicating the position of the body. He had told Ludd to see that those marks were not removed but, to double assurance, he had also made two small marks with indelible pencil, which would not be easily removed.

"You are sure she was asleep, sir?" asked Hant quietly.

Charles stared at him.

"What are you getting at?" he asked.

"Only that the Coroner is bound to take all possibilities into account. He is sure to ask you something like that sir."

Charles nodded, then turned on his heel, walked downstairs and out at the front door. The two detectives followed him down, and when they were alone Hant pointed to the chalk marks—faint by now; the two little purple dots were clearly visible.

"Stand here, Knott, and if anyone comes look as if you were taking notes."

Hant himself went upstairs again. It was a cold, blustery day outside and he was wearing a rather heavy overcoat, which he had not removed. The pockets seemed to be bulging with papers and gloves; in fact they contained two good-sized bags full of sand, and the weight on his shoulders was considerable. From one pocket he now drew a coiled fishing-line with a weight on one end; standing where Mrs. Rathlyn had stood he slowly lowered the weight until it touched the floor, then tied a knot in the line by the handrail.

"That'll give us height of fall, when we measure it," he said.

But it was not the height that interested him. What he saw was that Knott was standing some three feet further out in the hall than the point where the weight

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was touching the stone floor.

Looking quickly round to make sure that there was no one about, he took off his overcoat, folded it roughly and then gave it a sharp push outwards. The heavy coat fell as a body would fall—not fluttering about—and hit the floor quite close to the marks, rather to one side but just as far out. Fortunately the bags had not burst, and Hant, hurrying down, picked up the coat and laid it on a chair. The detective's eyes were glistening, but he made no comment.

Knott went through the business of taking some photographs, then the two police officers left the house and returned to Barryfield.

During the week-end that followed Superintendent Hant thought very carefully over the case, so far as he had been able to take it. He had formed a strong impression that Captain Rathlyn had murdered his wife, had deliberately pushed her over that balustrade, either when she was sleep-walking or under some other circumstances.

Early on Monday morning, therefore, he asked for an interview, and hearing what Hant wanted, Colonel Netterly summoned a full conference—himself, his Assistant Chief Constable, Mr. Janson, Superintendent Binnerton and Superintendent Wite, the chief clerk. They listened in silence while the detective described what he had seen and heard and gave his general impressions. When he had finished, Colonel Netterly looked at Binnerton.

"Any views, Mr. Binnerton?"

"I know very little about the case, sir, apart from what we learned last Monday and what Mr. Hant has told me. I'd agree that there's a possibility of murder, just as there is of suicide. If she *threw* herself over she might well land further out in the hall than a plumb drop. I think we should need a lot more before we asked the Coroner to consider either murder or suicide."

"You, Mr. Janson?"

"I think it is too early to judge, sir," he said quietly. "I agree with Mr. Binnerton that there is at the moment no case to justify our going for a murder finding at the inquest, but I am sure that Mr. Hant is quite right not to be satisfied to take things at their face value. I wouldn't lay too much stress on the position of the body; if the woman, feeling herself falling, gave a violent kick with her legs she might well land quite a distance out in the hall—from a height of thirty-five feet."

"That's right, sir," said Hant. "I quite see that point. But we can't get away from opportunity and motive."

Janson smiled.

"I don't think the money motive is a good one; he's much less well off now than he was. Have you

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looked for an alternative?"

"Well, sir, of course one looks round for the obvious alternative —a woman. I happened to hear only yesterday that Captain Rathlyn had been seeing a good deal of one young lady out hunting last season—a Miss Faery."

Colonel Netterly sat up with a jerk.

"Oh, come," he said, "don't let's build theories on anything so flimsy as that. Miss Faery was schooling one of Mrs. Rathlyn's horses and she gave him a helping hand when he had a nasty fall. So did I, for the matter of that. No, no; we've got no case at present, and unless something fresh turns up before the thirteenth I think we had better offer no fresh evidence to the Coroner. But that doesn't mean closing the case; we will just keep our eyes and ears open. I can see that Mr. Hant is still smelling a rat, and he isn't often wrong, though at the moment my personal opinion is that this is a straight accident."

So it was decided, and the days drew on to the date of the adjourned inquest, with nothing fresh coming to light which Hant could put forward as supporting his suspicions.

Charles Rathlyn had asked his own London solicitor, Mr. Warwick Harty, to watch the case on his behalf. Mr. Harty had done more than that. He at once saw that a vital point was confirmation of the sleep-walking explanation. There was his client's own story, of course, and Mrs. Tass's evidence was invaluable, but someone more completely independent would be even more convincing. Mrs. Tass's memory of early days proved, under questioning to be unreliable, but she did remember the name of 'old Doctor Torrance' who had looked after the Hillburn family in the days of long ago. Old Doctor Torrance would be dead now, but one of Harty's clerks, reconnoitring the town where the Hillburns had lived, discovered that the practice had been bought by a Doctor Lacey, and Doctor Lacey, himself now old, had hunted through forgotten case-books and discovered confirmation there which could not be challenged.

Even so, when Mr. Purde, still sitting without a jury, announced his finding it was to the effect that death had been due to a broken neck, the result of a fall, and that there was no evidence to show what had caused the fall.

Walking away from the room in which the enquiry had been held, Charles said:

"Does that mean a finding of accidental death?"

"Well, not quite," said Mr. Harty. "An open verdict. It would have been so much better if Dr. Jennerel had known about the recent sleep-walking. Mrs. Tass and Dr. Torrance's case-book were all very well, but they refer to very

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old history—which someone might use as cover."

Charles looked thoughtfully at his solicitor.

"That, of course, points to me. Are you seriously suggesting that I killed my wife?"

"Oh, good God, no. I am merely suggesting what might be the explanation of the open verdict."

On the whole, in spite of the ambiguous character of the 'open verdict,' Charles Rathlyn felt a sense of real relief that the adjourned inquest was over.

What really worried and depressed him now was that there was still no sign from Anne; just one kind but quite impersonal letter of sympathy. Answering it, he had said just that little more than was really necessary—enough to show her that her sympathy meant something real to him. He had left a loophole for a return letter from her—and no return letter had come.

He was churning these thoughts over in his mind as he sat in his study late on that Wednesday night in mid-October, when the door opened quietly and Isabel Wey walked in. Charles stared at her in astonishment; never before had she come to see him in his study at this time of day, but it was not just that—it was her appearance. She was dressed quietly enough in black, but somehow it did not look like the dress of a secretary, even off duty; it was, though Charles did not know it, a very expensive cocktail dress, made by a first-class London maker.

But Charles's eyes went quickly from her dress to her face, and it was here that astonishment struck him. Not only was the thin, sullen mouth no longer in evidence; even the touch of demureness that he had noticed when they discussed whether she should stay with him had gone. In its place, in the whole expression of her face, there was mischief—in the sparkle of her eyes, in the lifting corners of her mouth.

"Can I come in and have a talk?" she asked.

Charles rose hesitatingly from his chair, too much taken aback to answer. Walking to the big leather sofa, Isabel sat down, patted the seat beside her. Still almost mesmerised by astonishment, Charles weakly did as she suggested.

"Happy about the verdict?"

A queer sensation of discomfort, uneasiness, passed through Charles.

"I . . . I'm glad the inquest is over," he said.

Isabel smiled.

"I'm sure you are; so am I. Now we can talk."

"Talk? What about?"

"Well, not 'cabbages and kings.' Shall we say: Why you killed your wife? Or how you killed your wife?"

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Charles felt the blood drain from his heart, leaving him icy cold. "You must be quite mad. Why are you talking this nonsense?"

He rose quickly to his feet.

"Please go now and leave the house tomorrow. You shall be paid."

Isabel Wey remained seated. She gave a little laugh—quite a pleasant laugh.

"How well you do it," she said, "—the righteous indignation. Of course, you can't know; I saw the whole thing."

"Saw what?"

"I saw you push your wife over the balustrade."

"That's a damnable lie! I did nothing of the kind."

"Oh, but you did; I saw you. I had woken up and was coming to get a book. I know I had no business there, but I *was* there. Bad luck for you, Captain Rathlyn. I saw the whole thing."

Charles's face was grim now, his mouth set in a hard line.

"Then why didn't you tell the police what you . . . pretend to have seen?"

"That wouldn't have done anyone any good; you—or me," she said slowly.

"I suppose this is some sort of blackmail. You are simply inventing the whole thing—on what you have heard."

Isabel gently shook her head.

"I can easily prove to you that I was there. Do you remember what you said to Dr. Jennerel when you rang him up? You said your wife had had a bad fall and was very seriously hurt—that you thought her neck was broken, or her back. You said: 'Yes, I am afraid so,' and that you would not try to move her till he came."

"You may well have heard that. You were probably awakened by the fall and came along in time to hear that and now you are trying to build up some infernal lie. Tell the police what you heard."

Isabel Wey leaned back and raised her arms, clasping the hands behind her head. The action displayed her womanly figure to perfection.

"I might tell them . . . if I don't get what I want," she told him softly.

"They wouldn't believe you now —any lie you told."

"I rather think they would. You see, I know the answer to the other question—*why* you killed your wife. Do you remember the last time Mrs. Rathlyn went out hunting and came home alone? When you got back she let fly at you, and told you that she knew all about your making love to Anne Faery; she screamed at you —anybody might have heard it but it happened to be me. I don't think anyone else knows about Anne, but I'm sure the police would like to."

Charles turned slowly away

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and, walking across to the fireplace, looked down into the dying flames. Blackmail! What might not the police believe—any story that bolstered their suspicions? "What is it you want?" he asked in a low voice. "It is all a lie. I did not kill my wife, and you know it. But you can make hell for Miss Faery, as well as for me; I can see that. What do you want?"

Isabel rose from the sofa and walked across to him. Against his will he turned towards her. She smiled up at him, a long, slow, tantalising smile.

"Oh, not very much. Just a little pin-money. And not to go away from here . . . just yet. And . . ."

She came closer, raised her bare arms and slipped them round his neck.

"And be a little nice to me."

She looked very beautiful, her dark eyes gazing into his, her red lips a little parted. The perfume she was wearing flicked his senses. Slowly, as if hypnotised, Charles put his arms round her and kissed her.

As the weeks passed, Charles grew more miserable. Isabel showed no signs of weakening, and he was getting desperate. Soon he would have to leave Tandrings and find a new place, because as he expected, there was not enough money to maintain both estate and horses. He was also exceedingly worried about Hant.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Detective-Superintendent Hant had not lost interest. Far from it. In his bones Hant felt that Mrs. Rathlyn's death had been no accident, that her husband had either pushed her over the balustrade when she was sleep-walking or had in some other way engineered her death to look like an accident. How could he get proof that this had been no accident? It would be difficult, unless he could find someone who had seen or heard something suspicious on the night of Mrs. Rathlyn's fall. But he had questioned everybody in the house, and nobody seemed to have seen or heard anything—except, of course, Captain Rathlyn himself, who was probably lying.

Surely, if Captain Rathlyn had flung his wife down into the hall there must have been a struggle, a scream? Even if she had been sleep-walking, that attack would have wakened her and she would have fought and screamed—would she not? The only other person within possible earshot was Miss Wey, whose bedroom was on the same floor, though at the far end of a wing. And she, too, had declared that she had heard nothing. Hant remembered, though, that after his interview with her on the morning of Mrs. Rathlyn's death he had been left with the impression that she might be concealing

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something. He remembered, too, that at their next talk, when he was asking her about Mrs. Rathlyn's letter to her solicitor and the possible reason for it, she had seemed to hesitate . . . and then Captain Rathlyn himself had been heard in the hall and she had said: "Better ask him." Was it, he wondered, any good trying her again? He decided to try her again.

It was perhaps fortunate for Charles Rathlyn's peace of mind that he knew nothing of Hant's determination to seek out Isabel Wey. When he had slept on the uncomfortable bit of news that Carter Casling had given him, he was able to persuade himself that there could not be anything sinister in the enquiries that the detective had been making into the running of Silver Eagle. Probably the man had been just rounding off his enquiries into Kate's death, in the methodical routine way that policemen did.

So Charles comforted himself and, still unable to bring himself to face Anne Faery, still longing for a sight of her, decided one non-hunting day in January to take his car round in the direction of the Faery stables in the hope of seeing her, even in the distance, exercising or schooling one of her father's young hunters.

It was a clear, crisp afternoon—too crisp from a hunting point of view, though there was not much 'bone' in the ground. Charles longed to be riding himself, going for a long hack with Anne, talking quietly and happily about trivial or personal things—anything but the grim problem that obsessed him. So now he drove through country where he thought he might catch a glimpse of her, even though he did not expect or even want to talk to her. He was too ashamed to do that.

There were coverts of mixed oak and ash, bare now of leaf, but beautiful where the pale sunlight struck upon their stems. The road ran along a hollow, and it was clear that birds would rise well here as they passed from one wood to the other, away from the tapping sticks of the beaters. Charles's thoughts were on this pleasant, imaginary scene when a rabbit sprang from the hedge on his left and dashed across the road, closely followed by a yapping flash of white—a small, short-haired terrier. They were almost under his wheels when Charles swung the car abruptly to the right; fortunately he had not been going fast and he was able to stop just short of the ditch. Pursuer and pursued passed on, full pelt into the other wood, heedless of the new peril they had so narrowly escaped. Charles followed them with muttered curses and, restarting the engine, which had stalled, backed the car on to the road. As he did so, he saw a girl standing

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on the bank where the rabbit had come out—a girl in tweeds and jumper, wearing no hat. It was Anne Faery.

Charles stared at her stupidly and she at him. Neither showed a sign of being in the least pleased to see the other. Anne was the first to recover her manners.

"I'm so awfully sorry; I'm afraid Tiger must nearly have upset you."

Charles moved the car to the side of the road, swtiched off the engine, and got out. Taking off his cap, he held out his hand to Anne.

"I'm so glad to see you," he said. "It's been a very long time."

Nervousness and uncertainty made his voice dry. There was no smile on his face, and the girl looked at him with equal uncertainty. Then her eyes went past him into the wood where dog and rabbit had disappeared. "You know . . . I think I ought to go after Tiger. He goes down rabbit-holes and sometimes gets stuck."

Was it a rebuff? Intensely sensitive now, Charles nearly accepted it as such, and was on the point of saying good-bye when he realised that to do that would probably mean the end of their friendship.

"I'll come with you, if I may."

They climbed the bank into the wood and walked through the trees, Anne whistling and calling. Charles did not try to distract her with conversation, but watched the sunlight glinting on her brown hair. Presently they came to a large rabbit bury; as they did so an extremely dirty terrier backed himself out of one of the holes, gave himself a good shake, sneezed two or three times and then, with tongue hanging out, looked up at his mistress for approbation.

"Oh, Tiger, you little pig; what a mess you're in."

Anne bent down and brushed some more of the dirt from the dog's coat; it was little more than a nervous gesture. Then, standing up, on an impulese that she could hardly have explained, she said:

"Father's giving up."

Charles stared at her.

"Giving up? You mean—the farm? The business?"

Anne nodded.

"He says the bottom's fallen out of it in this part of the world. He has always gone in for making really highclass, expensive hunters; you know, several hundred guineas. There's no market for them in the provinces now—not enough people who can afford to pay those prices. It's all right in the shires, of course. We could always sell horses of a sort, but he won't do that; it's the making of them that he loves, and that takes time and costs money. So he's going to sell up and . . . he talks of going to Ireland."

Charles felt the blood drain

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from his heart. To Ireland . . . Anne? It would mean losing her altogether.

"Oh Anne, no. You can't . . . go away like that."

The girl saw the consternation in his face; it told its message more than his halting words could do. She was standing close in front of him; instinctively her hand went up, touched the lapel of his jacket. The next moment she was in his arms and words were pouring from him in wild confusion, like water long pent up by a dam.

"Anne! You mustn't go. Oh, Anne, I love you so. I have loved you from the first moment I saw you. It was hopeless, I knew. . . . And all that horrible trouble . . . the suspicion. . . . Anne, do you care for me a little bit? . . . I have tried to keep away from you. . . . I couldn't bring you into it all. Anne, don't go, don't go."

He was crushing her so closely to him that she could hardly speak, but her quick wit had picked out one coherent sentence from among the jumble.

"Why did you . . . try to keep away from me?"

"I . . . oh, Anne, does that mean you care a little bit? I have never known if you felt anything for me at all."

Anne Faery smiled up at him.

"I could hardly tell you that, could I? But you know now, Charles."

And so they stood, locked together, telling each other of their love. Charles was so wildly happy that the grim shadow had for the nonce fallen from him. Tiger, on the other hand, was bored and began sniffing again at the rabbit holes.

Gradually they came back to the world, to the problems that lay before them, to their plans for the future. Charles recognised the force of Captain Faery's arguments, but how would it be if they joined forces? In Leicestershire, perhaps; why run away to Ireland? There was, of course, a plethora of horse-dealers in Leicestershire and the other shires, but Faery had a reputation and he, Charles, had knowledge and skill, while Anne was the ideal maker, in conjunction with her father, of a woman's hunter. A partnership, the three of them together, Charles married to Anne—it offered a fairy-tale of hope and happiness.

And then Charles hit the ground—as hard a crash as he had hit it when Dashalong jumped into those solid oaken rails. Isabel Wey. Blackmail.

But he had something to fight for now and he was going to fight. Somehow he would get himself out of this mess. Nothing should keep Anne from him now.

"My darling," he said, "this is all going to happen, but I've got a battle to fight first. I'm not going to worry you with it all, but the

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fact is that the police still suspect that I killed my wife."

Anne stared at him in horror.

"Killed! Oh, how can they? But it was . . . the inquest; they said it was an accident."

Charles smiled.

"Well, not quite, apparently; what they call an open verdict. But that doesn't stop the police suspecting, and apparently they still do. I'm not going to drag you into that. I'm not even going to ask you to marry me until I'm absolutely in the clear. But I shall be . . . if you give me courage to fight them."

Charles drove home with happiness and grim determination mingled inextricably in his heart. Whatever happened he was finished with Isabel Wey now. He hated himself for having given in to her, for his weakness and cowardice, his horrible treachery to Anne. But he would be weak no longer. He would challenge her to do her worst; for all he knew her worst might be bluff—she might crumple if he called it.

When she came at her usual hour, looking as she always did now, young and attractive in her soft black frock, Charles was waiting for her in front of the fire, facing the big, heavily curtained window. She came straight to him but instead of kissing her he said:

"Not now, Isabel. I want to tell you that this must stop. I'm not going on with it. If you have anything to tell the police you must tell them."

He spoke quietly and his face showed no anger, but she recognised the tone in his voice. It did not daunt her; she smiled up at him and said, no less quietly:

"I don't think you quite realise. I can *prove* what I say."

"Prove what? It's only your word against mine."

"About the fall, yes—though my unbiased word will count more than yours. But I can prove that you were making love to Anne Faery and that your wife knew it."

She turned on her heel and walked out of the room. Charles stood, half bewildered, wondering whether she was coming back. She was back withing two minutes, standing again in front of him, holding in her two hands a piece of paper for him to read. Instinctively he read it and his heart fell; it was a letter from Kate to Anne; it was not in Kate's handwriting but the words were recognisably hers—not vulgar or offensive, but a little shrill; blunt and perfectly clear—'keep away from my husband'. If there were an original it would be damning evidence of motive. Combined with whatever Isabel might swear she had seen it would almost certainly lead to his arrest, might lead him to the gallows.

Isabel read his thoughts.

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"Oh yes, I've got the original all right. I never posted it. And so, you see, I've got you too, my dear man. And I'm not going to let you go."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE ASSISTANT Chief Constable had warned Superintendent Hant not to stir up suspicions about Captain Rathlyn's possible 'affairs' with women other than his wife. To be, in fact, discreet. Easier said than done. How could he find out that sort of thing without arousing suspicions? Well, perhaps there was another way; if he could not hear perhaps he could see.

Miss Faery was the one Hant really had in mind. However, the Assistant Chief had laid him onto a fresh line—unconsciously Hant's thoughts were following hunting metaphors. This female secretary, Miss Wey; what about her? A good-looker, right on the spot, wife getting old and fat; what more likely than that the Captain's eyes had wandered to a bit of all right so close at hand. The detective had a rather nastily suspicious mind.

He had said that Miss Wey had probably gone by now, but he soon found out that she had not. The fact at once struck him as suspicious. What would a girl like that—personal, confidential secretary to a lady—want to stay on in the house with the widower for if not for some personal reason? Surely in four months she could have found some suitable fresh employment?

So the detective determined to try the alternative mode of 'finding out'—to use his eyes, rather than his ears. Not, perhaps, his own eyes; it is hardly appropriate for a Detective-Superintendent to creep about looking round corners; but here was an admirable opportunity for one of his young detective-constables to prove his worth, and Hant chose the youngest and most active of them for the job—'creeping' might literally be needed, and even climbing.

Detective-Constable Michael Filblow was twenty-seven years old and had only been in the C.I.D. about eighteen months.

Filblow listened to the story with eager interest, asked a few supplementary questions, and having been told that if he got into trouble the police would disown him—in the best tradition of the secret service—went off to think out his plan of action. His terms of reference were: find out whether Captain Rathlyn has, since his marriage, been having an affair with any woman other than his wife, with special reference to the late Mrs. Rathlyn's personal secretary, Miss Isabel Wey.

As it was not to be known that

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he was a police-officer, clearly some sort of disguise was necessary—Stubbins, a gardener out of work. Not that he proposed to go asking for work—few men need do that nowadays—but in case he was seen and questioned that would serve. In the dusk or at night he could be just a poacher, and if he were nabbed he would 'take it' with a grin and pay his few bog fine, which is all the modern bench of magistrates deals out to a poacher in the cure-by-kindness state.

If this affair was going on indoors, when and where wuld it be happening? That depended partly on how far it had gone. If it were a really nasty bit of work, it would happen in somebody's bedroom and almost certainly with the lights out; there were too many people in the house for any game of that kind without extreme secrecy. But a flirtation, a close and honourable friendship, possibly with marriage in view, might take place with not much more than discretion, in a sitting-room probably, after the normal day's work was done—no interruption likely. If it were anything more open than that Filblow felt that he was bound to have seen them together in daylight.

From ten o'clock to twelve—those seemed the likely hours for philandering, and the whereabouts?—surely the Captain's study. If only he could look inside! Close inspection showed Filblow that there was a stone string-course—or whatever the correct expression was—running round the house at the level of the ground-floor window-sills; it gave, he found, just a toe-hold, and the friction of hands pressed against the brick wall should keep one upright. At the end of the house it was possible to get on to this course without a ladder; then one would have to edge carefully along it, turn the corner, and edge along again till one got to the study window.

Filblow tried the manoeuvre each night, fell off once or twice but too lightly to give himself away, and gradually acquired skill. If only the curtains were not drawn! Even a chink between them might show him what he wanted to see. There was no chink; Filblow cursed the butler as he watched him, evening after evening, drawing the curtains, carefully pulling them together so that they overlapped.

The weather turned cold, the ground hard; then, on the second cold night, when he was not looking forward to clinging by his toes and fingers to any wall, Filblow saw what he had been waiting for—a crack, thin as a pencil but definite, between the study curtains. Mounting the ledge at its most easily accessible point, he skilfully worked his way along, turned the

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corner of the wall and soon reached the window. He could see clearly enough—just the fireplace opposite him. No chair was visible, nor any human being; presumably there was someone in the room, because the lights were on, but for a long time there was no sign or sound. A clock struck eleven, and almost immediately afterwards a man's figure was visible, moving towards the fire. The man turned round; it was Captain Rathlyn. He appeared to be watching something to one side of the room—possibly the door; there was a look of tense expectancy on his face.

After about five minutes he saw Rathlyn stiffen, his eyes move . . . and then the figure of a woman came between him and the window, a woman in a black dress with short sleeves—unmistakably the secretary, Miss Wey, though her back was to the watcher.

Captain Rathlyn was speaking to her now; Filblow could see his lips moving, hear a faint murmur, but to his bitter disappointment he could distinguish no words. There was little expression on the speaker's face; certainly it did not look like the face of a lover—if anything, it was cold and stern. The detective could see nothing of Isabel Wey's expression, but suddenly she turned on her heel and disappeared, before he could get more than a glance of her face.

Was that all? Filblow's spirits slumped; what a flop!—no kissing and cuddling, not a smile, perhaps no more than orders for tomorrow. Captain Rathlyn was still standing in front of the fire, looking rather puzzled—no doubt he would disappear from view again in a second. The detective began to prepare for his own departure, easing his cramped limbs, flexing the fingers of each hand in turn . . . before he had moved away he saw Rathlyn stiffen again, again that look towards the door, again the back of Isabel Wey. He saw her hold up a piece of paper, which Charles Rathlyn appeared to read—then she moved close to him, her arms went round his neck, his arms round her!

Half an hour later the young detective had retrieved his bicycle from its hiding-place in a shrubbery and was pedalling vigorously back to Barryfield.

Superintendent Hant took the news calmly enough, but there was a glint in his eyes as he heard of the embrace.

"We'll get him now," he said quietly. "No doubt why he did it, though it'll take some proving. You keep on at it, young fellow; you've done well and you'll do better. Patience . . . you know what I said. Now that I know for a certainty I'll find some way of proving it."

But proof remained as far to seek as ever. Filblow saw no more

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scenes in the study—the crack in the curtain did not occur again.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Mrs. Tass leaned back against her propped pillows and sipped the cup of China tea which young Janet Penny, humblest of house maids, had just brought her. Her thoughts now were generally on the approaching change in her mode of life. She would be sorry to part from 'her' staff; the men servants of course—what were left of them—were no business of hers; Mr. Ludd was well enough, he had been trained in good houses, he knew his place and had never attempted to encroach on the housekeeper's domain; she quite liked him, but it would not break her heart to bid him farewell. It was the girls she cared about;

There remained, of course, Isabel Wey. About her Mrs. Tass had retained an obstinate silence, even to herself; she had known Isabel from a girl, had encouraged Kate Waygold to take her as her maid, and failed to discourage her from turning a respectable, useful maid into a quite unnecessary and soon conceited and impertinent secretary. Isabel, of course, came of superior stock—of some kind; she had been picked from an orphanage by Mrs. Tass herself, who had been struck by her good looks, refined speech and natural good manners. Who her parents had been the Orphanage either did not know or would not say. In her early years of service Isabel had remained a nice, respectable girl, but three years in the A.T.S. had done her no good at all; she had returned too sure of herself, too good-looking, and altogether too clever for either Mrs. Tass or her mistress; almost at once she had slipped into her new position of confidential secretary—or whatever the nonsense was.

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the sound of hurried footsteps in the passage outside; there was a hurried tap and the door at once opened to disclose Janet, breathless and wide-eyed.

"Oh, Mrs. Tass! Miss Wey!"

"Yes, Janet; what is it?"

"Oh, Mrs. Tass, she's . . . I think she's dead!"

Tears began to flow down the girl's rosy cheeks; she hiccoughed and choked.

"Shut the door, Janet, and come here. Now tell me, quietly."

Whatever she might feel, Amelia Tass never allowed herself to appear flurried or upset. She did not encourage it in others. Janet obeyed, her tears subsiding.

"I . . . I took her her cup of tea, just after yours, Mrs. Tass. Well, ten minutes after, I suppose. She says to be called a quarter to eight."

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"Much too late," murmured the housekeeper. "Go on."

"I don't switch on the light. She doesn't like it. I just drew back the curtains and then turned to take the cup to her . . . oh! . . ."

The girl's face was screwing up again.

"Now, don't make a fuss, Janet. Just tell me."

"She was . . . she's lying on her back, Mrs. Tass, her face all sort of . . . odd-looking. Her mouth and eyes are open and she's staring . . . oh, horrible! I don't . . . I don't think she's alive."

Action was needed. Orders must be given.

"Does anyone else know? Is Mr. Ludd about yet?"

"I haven't seen him, Mrs. Tass. I haven't told anyone else—I came straight to you."

"Quite right, but go and tell Mr. Ludd now. If he's not about tap at his door; and don't be shy, go right in and tell him, even if he's dressing. Pull yourself together and tell him quietly. Ask him from me to ring Dr. Jennerel at once and ask him to come. I will be down in two minutes."

In less than two minutes she was standing by Isabel Wey's bed looking down at the dreadful sight that had so distressed poor Janet.

The girl—as Mrs. Tass still thought of her; the woman, as she was—was lying on her back, the upper part of her body uncovered by blankets, as if she had thrust them back. It was covered only—most inadequately covered, as the housekeeper thought—by a very thin peach-coloured nightgown, low cut and sleeveless, a mere wisp of diaphanous nylon. Her beauty should have entranced the eye, even of another woman, but it did not now; the eye could only gaze in horror on the poor dead face, the sagging jaw, half-open eyes, the mottled skin. It was a sight that shocked the nerves even of calm old Amelia Tass.

Quietly she felt for a heart-beat, held a hand-glass before the mouth, then gently covered the dead woman's face with a face-towel. She looked about her and noticed that on the bedside table was a tooth-glass, with a little liquid, possibly water but clouded at the bottom. Two tablet-bottles lay beside it—apparently empty; on each was the word DORMONAL, with printed directions in smaller lettering. Mrs. Tass did not touch them. She did not even touch the broken cup and saucer which lay on the carpet, stained by the spilt tea, halfway between window and bed, though her fingers itched to remove the disorderly mess before the doctor came. But Mrs. Tass was thriller-trained as well as service-trained; she knew that Isabel Wey had died by poisoning, that the police would come,

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would want to test all possible 'vehicles' of the poison. Finger prints, too; no doubt they would be Janet's on this cup; little doubt that the 'poison' was plain overdose of sleeping drug—nasty stuff—taken in the tooth-glass. But better touch nothing.

Dr. Jennerel, when he came, was evidently of the same mind. He touched little more than Mrs. Tass had done, and soon led her from the room and locked the door, pocketing the key, to go down and wait in the hall until the police came in response to his summons.

Charles Rathlyn soon came into the hall and greeted the doctor quietly. His own face was grave and rather white; he looked more shaken than he had been even by his wife's death; that at least had been—or appeared to be—an accident, but this second death, following so soon . . . Ludd had told him that it appeared to be due to an overdose of some sleeping tablets; surely with a young and healthy woman no accidental overdose could have caused death in a few hours? Inevitably thoughts must turn to suicide—if they turned no further.

The police were polite enough to Captain Rathlyn, but, naturally, they did not ask him to accompany them when they and the two doctors trooped upstairs. Charles returned to his study, sat down at the writing-table, tried to read his morning mail, but soon gave that up and sat staring in front of him, his fingers—none too steady—playing with a paper-knife. For half an hour he sat there, almost motionless; then the sound of voices in the hall was followed by Ludd coming in to ask if Superintendent Binnerton might come and have a word with him. Soon both the police Superintendents were in the room; evidently the doctors had gone.

"Good morning, sir," said Superintendent Binnerton. "This is a sad affair. Such a fine young lady; a great favourite of the late Mrs. Rathlyn's, I understand."

"My wife was very fond of Miss Wey," said Charles, motioning the two police officers to chairs.

"I have been asking Mrs. Tass about next of kin. She says Miss Wey had no relations, so far as she knows. When she went on holiday she seldom left an address, I understand—just a hotel occasionally. Mrs. Tass tells me that Miss Wey came to Mrs. Waygold when she was still a young girl—Miss Wey was, I mean; she came from an Orphanage, of which I have the name. They may be able to tell me something, sir—possibly Mrs. Rathlyn may have told you something."

Charles shook his head.

"I'm afraid I have no idea; we never talked about Miss Wey in any personal way."

"Well, that's a pity, but we'll do

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our best. Now I'm bound to ask you, sir, about these sleeping tablets. It seems likely, the doctors tell me, that the poor young woman took a very large overdose, that caused her death. Did you know she was in the habit of taking such things, sir?"

Charles frowned.

"I don't . . . wait a minute, though; now you ask me, I remember that when I had rather a bad fall last season my wife gave me some tablets to help me sleep. She told me afterwards that she had borrowed them from Miss Wey. But Dr. Jennerel was here; he could tell you all about that."

"Dr. Jennerel did tell me about that incident, sir. He was not himself Miss Wey's doctor and did not prescribe the tablets, but he knew she had them. I just wondered whether it was a frequent practice with Miss Wey—taking these tablets."

"I shouldn't think so. She seemed healthy enough; surely a frequent use of such things would show up, one way or another. But I wouldn't know; again, why not ask Dr. Jennerel?"

Binnerton nodded, as if grateful for a helpful suggestion.

"I will, sir; I will. Now just one other thing; about last night—did you see Miss Wey at all? Did she seem in any way unusual? Depressed, or anything like that?"

Superintendent Hant, keeping his mouth shut but using his eyes, saw that dead-pan look come over Captain Rathlyn's face.

"I saw her for a few minutes after dinner. She came to ask about a situation she was thinking of applying for. She seemed perfectly normal and cheerful."

"That's very interesting, sir. Seems unlikely she would consult you on such a point if she was thinking of taking her own life."

"Did she often do that, sir? Come to talk to you in the evening? In your study, would that be?"

It was Hant speaking now. Charles Rathlyn turned to look at him.

"In my study, yes. No, not often; sometimes she did."

"Not every night?"

"Oh, no."

"Was she normally cheerful? Good company?"

"Miss Wey was a secretary, Superintendent, an employee," said Rathlyn quietly. "It would not be a question of 'good company'. She was normally cheerful, or at any rate not gloomy. Rather quiet, I should say."

"About this situation of Miss Wey's, sir—the one you say she was asking you about last night, can you tell us any more about that? Who it was to be with, or anything of that kind?"

Again that steady, searching look from the old soldier.

"I don't quite see how that can help you in whatever you may be

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enquiring into, Superintendent, but as a matter of fact I can't. It was the type of employment she was asking my advice about—a secretarial job with a very big firm of turf accountants; she didn't tell me the name of the firm. I told her that my advice, for what it was worth, was that she should stick to private employment, even though the pay would be less good. It should not have been difficult for her to find such a job again.

"It sounds very good sense, sir," said Binnerton, looking enquiringly at his colleague. But Hant had not finished.

"That's one of the points I have been wondering about, sir. It shouldn't have been difficult for her to find such a job again . . . and yet here she is, four, nearly five months since Mrs. Rathlyn's death. How would one account for that?"

Again Charles Rathlyn smiled.

"I couldn't hope to say what was in any woman's mind, but may she not just have been reluctant to leave a home in which she had been happy before she must? We have all got to leave soon; the household is being broken up next month, but up to now we have all remained."

Once more Hant hesitated; once more his eagerness drove him on.

"There would be no more . . . personal reason than that, sir?"

"What exactly do you mean by that?"

"There was no intimate or affectionate relationship between you and Miss Wey?"

Charles Rathlyn's steady grey eyes seemed to bore through the detective but he answered quietly enough.

"I hope you are not intending to be offensive, Superintendent. There has been no intimate relationship between Miss Wey and myself."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ISABEL WEY'S DEATH occurred, or had been discovered, on the morning of Tuesday, 15th February. On the evening of the following day Colonel Netterly called a conference—the usual party plus Dr. Lane-Fallick, who was at once asked to present his report.

"You won't want technical terms, Colonel, though they are all down here in writing. Death was due to a gross overdose of an hypnotic drug, known as Dormonal. It is one of the derivatives of barbituric acid; it is an American product and came on to the market during the war. It is an exceptionally powerful preparation and the more dangerous in consequence. As I said, I am speaking in lay rather than in

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medical terms," the doctor said.

"That any child can understand," muttered the Chief Constable.

"Exactly." Lane-Fallick's lean face broke into a quick smile. "I shall have to be more professional at the inquest—and probably much less comprehensible. A safe dosage of this drug is one tablet, containing twenty grains, or at the most two tablets; anything more than that would be liable to have a harmful effect and, with certain subjects, would be dangerous, though one would not expect so quick a death from anything less than two hundred grains—ten tablets, probably more. Each of these bottles contains eighteen tablets."

"Right. Well, go ahead, doctor; what had this girl got inside her?"

"I have the analyst's report here. He estimates two hundred and fifty to three hundred grains."

Colonel Netterly whistled.

"Nearly a whole bottle-full. No likelihood of accident there."

"None at all, I should say. You know, I am sure, that there were two bottles beside the bed."

"Yes, I knew that. Nothing to tell if they had both been full, of course. Where were they bought, Mr. Hant?"

"No chemist's name on the bottle, sir. Just the proprietary label. One appeared to be considerably older than the other. Dr. Jennerel had not prescribed them; she was not his patient; her panel doctor was Dr. Lews, and he had not prescribed them for her either. I have not been able to trace the purchase from any chemist in Barryfield, nor in Bascot, nor Hale."

"Odd. Well, we shall have to trace it, somehow. Where did she spend her holidays?"

"That's the odd thing, sir; nobody seems to know. I have one or two addresses of hotels, one at Bournemouth, one at Clacton; I will try there, of course. We have not been able to trace any next of kin; the housekeeper gave me the name of an Orphanage that the girl came from originally, but that closed down soon after the war and nobody seems to have kept their old records," Mr. Hant reported.

Colonel Netterly looked thoughtfully at the detective.

"All that seems rather peculiar," he said. "You searched her room, of course?"

"Yes, sir. I could find no address, no letters, nothing to indicate any private life outside her work."

The Chief Constable turned abruptly to Dr. Lane-Fallick.

"We mustn't keep you any longer, doctor; you're a busy man, I know. If you'll leave your report and the analysis we shall no doubt have to ask you some more questions later."

As soon as the surgeon had gone, courteously ushered out by

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Colonel Netterly, the latter returned to his chair.

"Pretty obvious suicide," he said; "but why? Love affair? Well, I know what you reported, Mr. Hant, but I find that difficult to swallow—as a cause for suicide. Of course, we must probe it; we'll discuss that later. But there seems to be some mystery about this girl's life; nobody knows anything about her—except the housekeeper, apparently, and she hasn't said much. Anyone got any ideas? Mr. Janson?"

"Has Miss Wey a bank account?" asked the Assistant Chief Constable.

"I have not enquired about that, sir," said Hant.

"Better find out; the manager might know something. That your idea, I suppose, Mr. Janson? Local clergyman? Doctor? Lews, did you say his name was?"

"He knows nothing personal about her, sir. I didn't think of the clergyman."

"Worth trying. And what about that other secretary—Monner, isn't it? Could there have been any affair with him, do you think, Mr. Hant?"

Hant shook his head.

"Rather the reverse, I should say, sir; didn't like each other, as far as I can make out. In any case, he's no lady-killer, I'm sure—in either sense of the word. A dull, prudish young man, I should say—well, not so young; getting on for forty, I suppose—and certainly hasn't got the guts to kill anyone; bit of forgery, perhaps, or fraud, or dirty sex business, but not murder."

"I wasn't suggesting murder," said the Chief Constable dryly. "I was looking for an explanation of suicide."

Hant was looking for something quite different, but he did not propose to argue the point now.

"Well, if no one's got anything else to suggest, I propose to go out to Tandrings and have another word with the housekeeper. If anyone knows anything interesting about the poor girl it will be she."

So the following morning, soon after eleven o'clock, Colonel Netterly rang the front-door bell at Tandrings and, learning that Captain Rathlyn was out, asked if he might have a word with Mrs. Tass.

Mrs. Tass herself, whom he had not previously met, was the housekeeper of tradition—like her room, cosy and neat, but with a definite air of dignity and authority . . . combined in this instance with respect for a gentleman and a Colonel.

He began by offering his sympathy to Mrs. Tass for the second tragedy that had fallen upon Tandrings. Gently he led her to talk about the dead girl; but to his disappointment he learnt little more

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than Hant had done. Certainly Mrs. Tass painted a fuller picture of Isabel Wey's character, standing against a very hazy background of early history, but this did not really clarify the portrait that had already formed in his own mind. Mrs. Tass knew nothing of Isabel's origin or of her early family life; Colonel Netterly was satisfied that she was concealing nothing from him.

Approaching the more delicate ground, he told the housekeeper that the police were bound to investigate the possibilities of suicide and that meant looking for the reason. Money, for a girl in her comparatively sheltered position, seemed an unlikely reason? Did Mrs. Tass know of any affair of the heart that might have gone wrong? No, Mrs. Tass had never heard of anything of the kind.

Colonel Netterly drew in his breath and ventured delicately on to the really dangerous patch of ice.

"Now, Mrs. Tass, I must ask you one more question that may seem to you very impertinent, even improper, but I have my duty to do, and you are a woman who has seen much of life and its tragedies. Is there any possibility at all that there has been any intimate relationship between Miss Wey and Captain Rathlyn? I would not ask this if I had not some ground for fearing that this might be the case."

The housekeeper's small body seemed to tighten, her lips pursed; Netterly feared that she was about to freeze him with her angry scorn. But she did not; she spoke quite quietly, even with gentleness.

"No, sir; I am quite sure that is not so. I was not happy when my . . . when Mrs. Waygold married again, but I have come to respect Captain Rathlyn and to trust him. He is a gentleman. He would not do anything wrong—like what you suggest—and I am sure that nothing of that kind could happen in this house without my knowing of it."

Alas, thought Netterly, for infallibility; in view of what Hant had told him, he feared that he must discount the value of Mrs. Tass's assurance. Well, he had learnt nothing . . . except that his own exquisite tact had proved no more effective a weapon than his detective's thrusting forcefulness. But Mrs. Tass was speaking again.

"No, sir, if there was anything of that kind in Isabel's life it didn't come from this house; more likely, if at all, it happened when she was in the Army."

"The Army?" Netterly sat up abruptly.

"She was in the Army for three years in the war, sir. I never thought her quite the same girl after."

Mrs. Tass told him what little

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she knew of this period in the dead woman's life, which really amounted to nothing, but the Chief Constable had now got a real piece of information, from which more might flow. Gently he detached himself, thanking the housekeeper for her help and apologising for any distress he might have caused her.

In the hall he found Ludd, correctly waiting to see him off the premises. In sum, Ludd's views coincided with those of Mrs. Tass; he did not believe the young person had been in love with anyone except that she did suffer from insomnia, and he had heard Mrs. Rathlyn talk to her about taking tablets to help her sleep; she was certainly 'edgy' at times, and perhaps the thought of having to find a new situation—after all, she had no real qualifications as a secretary—might have worried and depressed her.

Netterly got the clear view that the butler, as other members of the household, did not much like Miss Wey.

"About the night of her death, did you see her at all?"

"Yes, sir, I did. You may not know that Miss Wey and Mr. Monner take their meals together in his office. It is not an arrangement I have been accustomed to in any other situation in which I have been, but it was so here.

There was a bottle of St. Emilion this last Monday, and I noticed that Miss Wey seemed more talkative and in more cheerful spirits than usual when I cleared away. Nothing to suggest intended self-destruction sir."

"No other drink? Brandy? Liqueur?"

"Oh no, sir. Mr. Monner had a decanter of whisky and a syphon in his cupboard and occasionally had a night-cap, but not as a regular thing."

"Not that night?"

"I think not, sir; the housemaid would have brought the glass to the pantry next morning to be washed; I do not remember it being there."

"Just clear up the point and let me know—or Mr. Hant next time he is here, will you? He may have to come again."

Quietly warning the butler to keep their conversation to himself, Colonel Netterly took his leave, returned to headquarters and, sending for Hant, told him what he had learnt.

"Doesn't amount to much, I'm afraid," he said. "You didn't tell me Miss Wey had been an AT."

"Nobody had told me, sir," said Hant shortly, displeased at having been caught napping by his superior.

"Well, that'll probably give you the answer to one question. There'll be a 'next of kin' somewhere on her papers. Better get along to A.T.S. Records, Winchester, and find out."

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AT WINCHESTER, Detective Superintendent Hant learnt what he wanted to know; the next of kin of WEY, ISABEL was given as HONORIA CHASTERTON, relationship: mother; address: 26 Corran Road, Bournemouth.

Mother! Then why had the girl been found in an orphanage? And why 'Wey'? Well, that could easily be discovered now, assuming Mrs. Chasterton to be still alive, and even if she were dead surely she at least would have traceable relatives. To Bournemouth then, another simple train journey. Hant rang up his headquarters to say where he was going and that he would probably be away for the night; he asked that Mrs. Hant should be told.

The detective's first move on reaching Bournemouth was to pay a call at the Police headquarters. He found that the Superintendent in charge of the Division was a man he had met on a course not many years previously, so relations were at once easy and there was no necessity for any formalities to be followed.

"You've got a big job here, Willan," Hant said. "I don't know what the population of Bournemouth is, but I doubt if you know the name of every one of them. Fortunately I've got that; I'm looking for the next of kin of a young woman who's just committed suicide or been murdered in our parish. Name of Chasterton, the mother is."

Superintendent Willan stared at him.

"Chasterton? That's not a common name, but it can't be her."

"Honoria Chasterton is the full name."

"My word, it is then. But good lord alive, man, she can't be the mother; she's 'Miss'."

Curiouser and curiouser. Still, thought Hant, she wouldn't be the first 'Miss' who had had a baby and tucked it away in a home. Anyway, it didn't matter; he was not interested in the mother, only in what she could tell him about her daughter.

"What sort of a person is she, this Miss Chasterton? How do you come to know of her so pat? Is she a local celebrity or something?"

"You mean to say you've never heard of her! Man, where's your culture in Barryshire? Honoria Chasterton is well known all over England, I should have thought, and outside it—or was till she fell sick. A great musician; concert pianist, don't they call it?"

"Crippled by arthritis these last ten years; a proper tragedy," Willan was saying. "Of course, it matters to us here; she's a Bournemouth woman, and used to play here a lot. But a child—I never heard of one. Don't know that I

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believe it now, saving your presence."

Within ten minutes he was in Corron Road, a short, winding street of neat little houses, not very close to the sea-front. Ringing the bell of No. 26, he sent in his personal card by the rather youthful maid who opened the door and asked if Miss Chasterton would see him for a few minutes. A moment later he was in the sitting-room, introducing himself to its striking occupant.

Miss Chasterton was now some sixty-five years old, grey-haired, white and thin of face, but beautiful in a cold, classical way and sitting bolt upright in a wheeled chair. A pair of steel-blue eyes searched her visitor's face.

"Who are you, Mr. Hant? Ought I to know you?" she asked, as soon as the door had closed behind the maid.

"No, madam, you won't know me."

Hant held out his warrant-card for her to see, and immediately her mouth tightened, the knotted hands on her lap closed on one another. She knew, thought Hant, what he had come about.

"A young lady in our county—a Miss Isabel Wey—has just died under circumstances that have to be enquired into. We could not at first find out who her relatives were, but A.T.S. records have just shown us, madam, that she gave your name as her mother. May I ask, madam, if that is correct?"

Still silence for a while and then:

"Is it absolutely necessary, Superintendent, for this to become known? This . . . relationship? I am a well-known woman; I have done much, played much for charitable and religious institutions. My name means something, and if it is smirched, harm will be done to others besides myself. I was never married. No one, I believe, knows that I have a daughter—that I had one. Must it be known now?"

Hant hesitated. He had no authority to pledge anyone to silence; still . . . he saw the point.

"That is something I can't answer myself, madam. The Coroner must know, and of course the Chief Constable. It is possible that, if you help us in the way we want, they may find it not necessary to publish the name."

"I will tell you my story, Superintendent, and I trust you to do your utmost to keep it secret if that is at all possible. I think you will see that, since her birth, I have really played no part in my daughter's life and can tell you nothing that will account for her death."

Her story was a sad one. Isabel had been born of an indiscretion, and she had placed her in an orphan's home. She had heard nothing of her till a few years back when Isabel visited her and

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threatened to reveal her secret if she didn't pay her.

Isabel Wey had tried to squeeze money out of her own mother. Blackmail! Was that the answer to the whole puzzle? Did that, rather than intrigue, explain what Filblow had seen? Had she been blackmailing Charles Rathlyn, and was the answer not suicide, but murder?

Beside that, Mrs. Chasterton could offer only the name of the hotel in which Isabel stayed when she had visited her.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

First thing next morning Hant presented himself again in Willan's office and asked for the names and addresses of all banks in the town. A large order, it appeared; there seemed to be plenty of banking business to be done in Bournemouth. Hant explained that an idea had occurred to him; Miss Wey had no established home, but she had been to Bournemouth for three of her holidays, at least; he had not been able to discover that she kept a bank account in Barryfield; was it possible that she had one here?

"No harm in finding out. I can help you there; the banks are on very good terms with us and will tell us what they might not tell a stranger. I'll arrange with Betteridge for two of his detective-constables to go round to each branch and find out in the first place if there is such an account. Then if there is, you can go straight to the spot. Save you hours."

That was a truly noble offer, and Hant accepted it gratefully. While Willan's detectives were doing the preliminary work he did his second job, visited the hotel where Isabel had stayed and found the chemist who had supplied her with Dormonal.

Returning to police headquarters, Hant learnt that the Union Street branch of the Provincial and South Coast Bank had owned to an account in the name of Miss Isabel Wey. The manager, Mr. Jolliphant, would be glad to see Superintendent Hant.

"Like me to come too?" asked Willan. "Might be a help if you want to rob him of anything. Not like the old lady's good name."

Hant saw the force of that. He did not want to get entangled in red tape; the local Superintendent might be able to cut his way through it.

Mr. Jolliphant proved to be a pleasant, middle-aged man, by no means overburdened with a sense of his own importance. The Bournemouth detective had told him that a Barryshire Superintendent was investigating a case of suspected suicide, and though the bank manager had not heard of

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Miss Wey's death—the name, indeed, meant little to him—he had got out the ledger containing her account and was prepared to give such information as he thought proper.

Miss Wey, it appeared, had opened her account with the bank as long ago as August 1950. She had then paid in seventy pounds; one of the cashiers remembered the occasion and said that she had paid in five-pound notes. Since that date sums of ten pounds and twenty pounds had been paid in at fairly regular intervals of a month; in the last two years the amounts had tended to increase, and there had also been a sum of two hundred pounds in November of 1954 and a further two hundred pounds on 15th January in the present year.

Hant's heart quickened its beat as he listened. Here was almost certain proof that his suspicions were correct; not proof as yet to satisfy a jury, but proof enough for himself. A large payment within two months of Mrs. Rathlyn's death, another last month . . . and now Isabel Wey was dead herself!

"Paid in here, sir? By cheque?"

Not, of course, Rathlyn's cheque; that would be too much to expect.

"In cash each time, sent by registered post with a short covering letter—so I am told," said the manager. "Miss Wey has, so far as we are aware, not personally visited the bank since August 1950, and she has drawn none of it out. Her instructions were that it should be placed upon deposit. The total amount on deposit now, including accumulated interest is thirteen hundred and seventy-five pounds odd."

He studied the ledger carefully, and soon realised that if there was any significance in these figures, apart from the two sums of two hundred each, he would have to have a copy of the whole account at his disposal for reference. He asked the manager, as a great favour, if one could be got out for him.

Mr. Jolliphant hesitated, looked at Superintendent Willan, and apparently obtained encouragement there.

"I think I had better tell you, sir, that the case I am investigating may turn out to have been murder, not accident or even suicide. I have had my suspicions of that strengthened even since I came to Bournemouth yesterday. It is of the first importance that you should give me all the information you can and with the least possible delay."

Superintendent Willan was looking startled; Hant had said nothing to him about murder. Mr. Jolliphant, too, was startled. He, too, thought for a minute.

"In that case, Superintendent, I think I must tell you something

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more," he said. "Miss Wey has, I am told, from time to time sent to us sealed envelopes for safe keeping. I do not, of course, know what is in them; they remain sealed. But they may contain something of significance to your enquiry."

Naturally Superintendent Hant was not going to decline this offer. Mr. Jolliphant disappeared, taking the ledger with him, and after a rather long delay returned with a handful of fat yellow envelopes of the size—9 in. by 4 in. —in which folded foolscap sheets are conveniently enclosed. He also brought a typewritten sheet bearing the figures copied from Isabel Wey's ledger account.

"I have had a word with my head office," said the manager, "and they feel that under the circumstances they must release these documents for inspection by the police. I imagine that you will want to take them away with you. If you give me a receipt, that will be in order."

Hant suppressed a sigh of relief; that was something he had wanted but had not expected so easily to get. Calmly Hant wrote out a receipt on an official form, locked the envelopes away in his attaché case and rose swiftly to his feet.

"I can't thank you enough for your help, sir," he said. "My Chief will be most grateful and, of course, if these documents are not needed they will be returned to you."

"More than welcome," said Willan. "Like to come along to my office and look through them? Then a bite of lunch."

Hant glanced at his wrist watch.

"Thanks," he said, "but there's a train at 12.37 that will get me back. Besides, my Chief will want to open these himself."

That was pure invention, but Hant wanted no other nose in this pie. He held out his hand and shaking Willan's, walked briskly off in the direction of the station. The Bournemouth man watched him with a rueful twist of his mouth; he had been itching to see inside those envelopes.

"Of all the ungrateful so-and-sos," he muttered. Then, with a smile, "Oh well; perhaps I'd have done the same."

Hant reached Barryfield soon after three o'clock, and finding to his delight that both the Chief Constable and Mr. Janson were out, retired to his own small office to examine his treasure trove. Slitting open the first of the envelopes, he drew out a bundle of sheets, not of foolscap but of octavo size. On each was typed a list of dates, each with a sum of money entered against it, generally £10 or £20, but occasionally a larger figure, up to £50. The figures were totalled up, usually to amounts varying between £100

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and £200 per month. At the head of each sheet was the month and year—1952. Included in the envelope with these monthly sheets of figures was another sheet containing a series of dates only, this time in pencil—not typewritten; there were only about thirty of these dates, covering the whole year. The dates on this sheet appeared to bear no relation to the dates on the sheets showing sums of money.

Hant found it difficult to decide what the significance of these dates and figures might be. The monthly totals were considerably higher than the amounts which Mr. Jolliphant had said that Miss Wey sent to the bank each month. A glance at the copy of Miss Wey's account showed Hant that this was so; apart from the £70 paid in in August 1950, when the account was opened, there had been no sum larger than £30 paid in until the figure of £200 in November 1954 and £200 in January 1955. In the year 1952, to which the dates and figures in this envelope were confined, the largest sum paid into Miss Wey's account was £20, which occurred in July, with further sums of £20 in October and December; all the other amounts paid in had been for £10.

For the moment it was difficult to see the connection. Hant shrugged his shoulders, pushed the bundle of sheets on one side and slit open the next envelope. The contents were of a similar nature, but bearing the date 1950. There was, however, one difference which might prove to have some significance: the lists of dates and figures dealt only with the months April to December and the hand-written list of dates began in May 1950. Bearing in mind that Miss Wey had opened her account in Bournemouth in August 1950, it did seem possible that there might be some connection, though what it was was not at all clear.

The amounts paid into the Bournemouth bank might, of course, represent her salary, or such of it as she did not spend. But what had she been doing with it before August 1950? The figures shown on these dated sheets clearly could not be salary; Hant did not know what a secretary, living in, would receive, but it certainly would not be £100 to £200 a month, in varying amounts.

Opening another envelope, Hant found the same thing—for the year 1954. It was most disappointing; evidently each envelope contained the same—lists of dates and payments, but for different years.

An examination of the 1954 lists did, however, produce evidence of importance. The dates and the payments ceased in September of that year; clearly both lists had some connection with Mrs. Rathlyn herself. Probably they were

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some accounts of hers, and so could surely be explained, either by Captain Rathlyn or by the other secretary, Monner, or by the auditors—if it proved that Mrs. Rathlyn's accounts were audited. He would have to consult the Chief Constable on the point; Captain Rathlyn, of course, was a suspect—at any rate in his, Hant's, mind; it might be unwise to question him and put him on his guard.

That brought the detective back to his own definite view of the case; he was pretty sure now that Isabel Wey had been blackmailing Charles Rathlyn. What about, he did not know; possibly she knew something about the death of Mrs. Rathlyn, something she had seen or heard that might point the finger of suspicion at him. If that were so, it seemed but a step to the suggestion that not only had the Captain murdered his wife but that, being blackmailed, he had murdered Isabel Wey too, to silence her. A very neat theory, thought Detective-Superintendent Hant; all right, now go ahead and prove it.

There remained three envelopes, one much slimmer than the others. Slitting it open, Hant found that it contained only another envelope of correspondence size. One glance at this, however, set the detective's heart pounding in his breast. The envelope was of good quality, bearing a postage stamp but no postmark; it was addressed in what was evidently a woman's hand to Miss Anne Faery, Noolands Farm, Little Lawton, Barryshire. Handling it with great care, because it might yet disclose finger-prints, Hant drew out the letter which it contained. As he read the brief contents of the letter the detective's eyes sparkled with excitement.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Colonel Netterly looked in at headquarters that evening to see whether Superintendent Hant had returned. He found his C.I.D. chief eagerly awaiting him.

"I've made quite a bit of progress, sir," said Hant, as soon as he was seated in the Chief Constable's office.

"Half a moment." Colonel Netterly flicked a switch on his house-telephone. "You there, Janson? Come in, will you?"

When the Assistant Chief Constable also was seated Hant took up his tale, beginning correctly at the beginning—Winchester—and working steadily through to the end—the letter to Miss Faery. His superior officers listened without interruption—admirable trait in a well-trained force.

"The letter is signed 'Katherine Rathlyn', sir, as you will see. I

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have seen a specimen of her handwriting, and I have no doubt that this is hers, but of course I will check up on that."

He handed the letter to Colonel Netterly, who read it and passed it to Mr. Janson.

"Not much doubt what was in her mind, I'm afraid. But from the envelope—the unfranked postage stamp—it does not appear to have reached Miss Faery."

"No, sir. My guess is that Mrs. Rathlyn gave it to Miss Wey to post and she didn't post it. Guessed what might be in it, opened it, and used it to blackmail Captain Rathlyn. If he was having an affair with Miss Faery, that would be a motive for his killing his wfe, sir."

"I imagined that that would be your idea," said Colonel Netterly dryly. "But this letter is no proof of an 'affair'; it merely tells Miss Faery, rather crudely, to keep away from Captain Rathlyn. Unless you have some further grounds, some confirmation of your suspicions, I don't see that this letter takes us much further."

All that was dogged and determined in Detective-Superintendent Hant appeared in his jutting chin.

"I propose with your permission, sir, to question Miss Faery," he said.

Colonel Netterly's hand gently tapped the blotting-pad in front of him.

"I agree that she should be questioned," he said quietly, "but I will question her myself—in the first place, at any rate."

Hant recognised the look on his chief's face; with difficulty, but success, he restrained himself.

"Very well, sir. And these other papers that Miss Wey had sent to the bank; will you wish to look through them yourself? As far as I can make out, they are some accounts of Mrs. Rathlyn's—possibly some cash accounts. They cover the last five years. I daresay Mr. Monner could explain them."

"I'm sure he could. Ask him. If he can't, then ask Captain Rathlyn."

"You think that wise, sir . . . under the circumstances?"

"He already knows he's under suspicion, if that's what you are afraid of, Mr. Hant. He is no fool. If he is a guilty man you may be able to startle him into some unwise answer."

"There is that, sir," Hant agreed. "Shall I leave Miss Wey's bank statement too, sir? The two significant entries are the figures of two hundred pounds in November last and January this year. The rest are comparatively trifling sums that may just be Miss Wey's unexpended salary."

"I doubt that," said the Chief Constable. "If that were so, what was she doing with it—with the money she did not spend—before January 1950?"

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"That did occur to me, sir, and it is a puzzle. The trouble is that I have not been able to trace any local bank account of hers."

"Have you thought of the Post Office?" asked Mr. Janson quietly.

Hant looked at the Assistant Chief Constable in something like consternation.

"I never thought of that, sir," he said. "The P.O. Savings Bank."

"Check up on it, please," said Colonel Netterly.

Colonel Netterly felt extreme reluctance in carrying out his self-imposed task. It was most unpleasant to have to question a decent girl about her relations with a married man, particularly as the questioning must suggest some connection with the death of that man's wife.

But Netterly was not going to leave this very delicate questioning in the hands of his forceful Detective-Superintendent. Hant was an able officer, but some of his methods were crude, and in this case his victim would be a young girl of decent family and upbringing, against whom he had never heard one word of unkind criticism.

It was not easy to settle on the right time and place. He did not want to question her in front of her father; after all, if there had been anything between the girl and Charles Rathlyn it was entirely her own affair, and it would not be right to expose her to parental criticism. He finally arranged to meet her at her home alone, the following day.

It was a little after 2 p.m. the Chief Constable drove into the yard of Noolands Farm and soon found himself in the snug sitting-room with Anne Faery. The girl was still in her hunting kit, though she had removed her velvet cap. She offered him a drink, which he declined. Then a thought struck him.

"Have you had your lunch?" he asked.

Anne shook her head.

"Not want," she said. "Please go on."

That, to Netterly, was a sure sign of nervousness, but he took no notice of it.

"Well, it's just this," he said. "You know we have still not quite cleared up the problem of Mrs. Rathlyn's death, and now there's this about her secretary, Miss Wey. You must wonder why I bother you, but the fact is that we have come across a letter that concerns you and that . . . that might possibly throw some light on Mrs. Rathlyn's death. It is a most unpleasant thing to do, but I am bound in duty to ask you about it."

He took from his pocket-book the letter addressed to Miss Faery by Katherine Rathlyn, and handed it to her. As she read it he saw her face flush and then turn white.

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"I never had this," she said, a quaver in her voice. "What is it? Why . . .? Why should she think . . .? I only met Captain Rathlyn out hunting—that was all. Oh . . . oh yes, and I did go to a play with him in London once. He was there on business, and I was staying with my aunt. We went to a play and then had supper and danced at the Berkeley. That was all. There was nothing, nothing at all."

The brown eyes looking up so frankly into his carried complete conviction to Colonel John Netterly. Still, he must make absolutely certain. His voice was rather gruff and curt with embarrassment as he asked:

"You give me your assurance that there was nothing between you and Captain Rathlyn that would justify any jealousy . . . any anxiety on the part of his wife."

"Nothing. No, nothing. I promise you absolutely."

Netterly's face relaxed.

"I'm so glad," he said, in a different voice. "I am so sorry to have had to ask you. Please forgive me . . . and thank you."

While Colonel Netterly was carrying out his delicate mission Detective-Superintendent Hant was doing his own job at Tandrings. In fact, he had got it done before the Chief Constable started. He was not in a good temper, and nobody could expect to be the better for that fact. Without any tactful asking of permission from Captain Rathlyn, the detective told Ludd that he had come to see Mr. Monner and was at once taken to the latter's office. His appearance was therefore unexpected and Hant thought that the secretary seemed startled and by no means pleased to see him. However, he put a chair for his visitor and himself sat down again at his desk, waiting for Hant to state his business.

The detective put his attaché case on his knee and unlocked it.

"Still here?" he asked.

"Still here, but not for much longer."

"Got a new job?"

"I am glad to say that I now have a situation to go to. I leave on the third of next month."

"Same sort of thing?"

"Not quite. An office job, in London. In what way can I help you, Superintendent?"

Hant opened his case and taking out one of the sets—the 1952 set—of dated and figured sheets that Miss Wey had sent to her bank laid it on the desk before the secretary.

"What's all that about?"

Monner slowly turned over the sheets, astonishment showing in his face.

"Where did these come from?" he asked.

"It's I who am asking the questions, Mr. Monner. What are

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they?"

The secretary frowned.

"I asked you a perfectly reasonable question," he said. "These pencilled dates are something of Miss Wey's; they are in her handwriting. I have no idea what they mean. The others seem to be . . ."

He rose from his chair and walking to a tall filing cabinet took out a folder and returned to his seat. Taking some sheets from the folder he compared them with those which Hant had given him.

"Yes, these are Mrs. Rathlyn's cash accounts, though I don't know where you got them from."

Philip Monner held out to the detective a set of similar sheets, set out rather differently and evidently done with a different typewriter, for the year 1952. At the bottom of each sheet was a bold signature—K. Waygold. Monner explained to the detective, as he had done to Charles Rathlyn soon after his marriage, how Mrs. Rathlyn's—previously Mrs. Waygold's—cash requirements, extremely erratic and sometimes large, were provided for; how he cashed a substantial cheque once a month or oftener, keeping the money in his safe and handing it out to her as she required it; how at the end of each month he submitted to her an account of what she had had, and how she signed it—two copies, one which she kept herself and one which he filed. He explained that the auditors had suggested that it would be better if Mrs. Waygold signed for each amount doled out to her but that she had declined to be bothered to that extent—once a month was bad enough. This copy, which he held, was what she had had in the month shown.

"And are these things that I have got the other copies—the copy you gave her? I thought you said she signed them too."

"She did. These are not the ones. I don't know what they are. I still don't know where you got hold of them."

Hant hesitated, then said that they had been found among Miss Wey's papers. Why, he asked, should Miss Wey have copies of these accounts?

"I have not the least idea, Superintendent," said Monner. "Accounts were in no way the concern of Miss Wey. Unless . . ."

He hesitated, biting his lips and tapping the table with his long, sensitive fingers.

"Miss Wey was jealous of my position as Mrs. Waygold's—Mrs. Rathlyn's accountant. She was also an extremely inquisitive and ambitious young woman. It would not surprise me if she had had some idea of supplanting me in this, as in other secretarial duties."

His voice was trembling; Hant sensed the bitter dislike which the man felt, in common with other members of the household, he thought, for this pushing and

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egotistical young woman.

"That may be the answer. And you don't know what these other dates of hers mean?"

"I have no idea at all."

"Would Captain Rathlyn be likely to know?"

"He might. I really can't say."

Nothing more to be got here, thought Hant. He went along to the hall and rang the front-door-bell.

"Your master in?" he asked when Ludd appeared.

"Captain Rathlyn is somewhere in the precincts, I believe," said the butler coldly.

"Tell him I . . . oh, there he is."

"Captain Rathlyn, in riding breeches and jack boots, was coming across the gravel sweep in front of the house. As he came in at the front door, opened to him by Ludd, he looked enquiringly at the detective.

"Do you want me, Mr. Hant?"

"Just a word, sir, if I may."

Charles led the way into his study and shut the door.

"Been hunting, sir?"

"Not hunting; just riding. I haven't hunted for a long time now," said Charles quietly.

Hant felt somehow as if that was supposed to be his fault. Opening his attaché case he took out the papers he had shown to Monner and handed them to Captain Rathlyn.

"I understand that those typewritten sheets refer to Mrs. Rathlyn's cash accounts, sir, but I have not been able to make out what the pencilled dates are. Mr. Monner thinks they are in Miss Wey's handwriting."

Charles looked at them.

"But these are 1952. I wouldn't know anything about them. I wasn't on the scene then," he added with a smile.

Hant took them back, frowning at his own lack of thought; in their place he handed over the sheets dealing with 1954—the dates that stopped in September 1954. Looking at them Charles Rathlyn's face grew grave. Going to his writing-table he took a Badminton diary from a drawer—his old 1954 diary. Carefully he compared the pencilled dates with his diary.

"It isn't very easy to say what they are, I find that in one or two cases they correspond with dates when my wife and I were away from Tandrings—look, the first Newmarket summer meeting; we stayed up there with friends. And Ascot—two days away then. And, of course, there was that fortnight when we were in the south of France, back in February. I'm afraid I didn't make a note of our day-to-day movements, but if we were staying away for a race meeting or something like that—well, I did have a note of that. These other dates—quite a lot of them, aren't there?—I don't know what they are."

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CHAPTER TWENTY

AFTER HIS TALK with Anne Faery, Colonel Netterly went straight home.

As far as Anne Faery was concerned he was now quite satisfied. He would have backed to the utmost his belief that she had not been lying to him. It was just as well, though, that she had told him quite frankly about that evening in London; if she had not done so, and if Hant had found out about it— he well might—it might have been difficult to give it an innocent explanation. Even as it was it did suggest that there had been *some* feeling, rather stronger than casual friendship, between the two; a married man did not normally ask an unmarried girl, ten or fifteen years younger than himself, to spend an evening in London with him unless she interested him more than a little. Natural enough that she should; he had often seen them together out hunting, and her care for Rathlyn when he was hurt did show something of the same kind —whatever he himself might have said to Hant on the subject. Probably there had been just enough to make Mrs. Rathlyn jealous, though not enough to justify that extremely unpleasant letter. Of that he felt quite sure, after hearing Anne's firm denial, after seeing the frankness and honesty in her eyes.

But about Rathlyn himself he could not feel so happy. That ugly story of what Detective-Constable Filblow had seen through the curtains of the study window stuck in his gizzard.

As in the case of Mrs. Rathlyn, the Coroner had adjourned the inquest in order to allow the police time to pursue their enquiries —but this time only for a week. To Mr. Purde this was clearly a case of suicide; it was proper for the police to try and find out the reason for it—but it was not a matter, he felt, that should take up too much time and money.

The police, therefore, felt constrained to push ahead with their enquiries, and on Monday morning Superintendent Hant once more asked for an interview with the Chief Constable. He began by telling Colonel Netterly what he had learnt on Saturday from Philip Monner and Captain Rathlyn—little enough, so far as the sheets of dates and figures were concerned. He then said that he wanted authority to question Captain Rathlyn about the entries of £200 in Miss Wey's bank account. At this point Colonel Netterly interposed to tell him of the interview he had had with Miss Faery on Saturday afternoon, ending by an assertion that he was entirely satisfied that, in denying any affectionate association

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between herself and Captain Rathlyn—anything to justify jealousy on the part of Mrs. Rathlyn—the girl had been telling him the truth. Superintendent Hant listened in silence, and his next words showed that, so far as he was concerned, the matter was by no means cleared up.

"I should wish to question Captain Rathlyn about that letter, sir, as well as about the entries in Miss Wey's account."

Colonel Netterly looked at him thoughtfully.

"You are pressing him very hard, Mr. Hant," he said.

"Yes, sir. I think he killed his wife."

"I doubt it, you know. He was much better off with her alive."

"That may be so, sir, but money isn't the only motive. My belief is that he wanted to be free to marry again."

"You heard what I said about Miss Faery, Mr. Hant. I have a good deal of experience, and I believe I know when someone is lying to me. I am quite sure that Miss Faery was telling me the truth."

"That may be so, sir, and yet he may have wanted to marry her—even without her knowing it."

Colonel Netterly shrugged.

"I suppose that that is possible, if not very likely. You are quite right to make sure. Tell me, what exactly is it that makes you suspect Captain Rathlyn of murder?"

Hant pulled himself together.

"In the first place, that fall, sir. If she merely toppled over, she would have fallen straight down, but her body was lying some three feet farther out into the hall, as if she had been pushed or thrown outwards from the gallery where she stood."

"And why?"

"Several alternative motives, sir. Money, in the first place. As you say, sir, he was better off with her alive, but was he going to stay better off? What if she was going to divorce him? You'll not have forgotten, sir, that she had sent for her solicitor. He says he doesn't know what she wanted him for, and probably now no body knows—except, perhaps, Captain Rathlyn. What if she was going to speak about a divorce—and Captain Rathlyn knew it? What if she was going to instruct him to alter her will—and Captain Rathlyn knew it?"

Hant paused, to let these ideas sink in.

"I hadn't thought of that. Go on, Mr. Hant."

"Then, sir, there are the other alternatives, partly overlapping, partly contradictory, that you know of. That he wanted to be free to marry Miss Faery, or to marry or carry on an intrigue with Miss Wey. And that brings one to the second case—Miss Wey's death. May she not have been blackmailing him? And if so, isn't

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it likely that he put her out of the way?"

The Chief Constable sat for a minute in silence, frowning at his own lean hands.

"I follow your chain of thought," he said at last. "It is logical, and I am sure that you are right to test it as fully as you possibly can. Even if you are right, it will be extremely difficult to prove either case—without an eye-witness. The second case particularly; how on earth could he have persuaded Miss Wey to take twenty tablets of Dormonal? Still, I agree that you must go on trying. You want to go out and question him now, I gather? Very well, I agree. If anything more is to be done, it is time for a direct attack."

"Thank you, sir." Hant rose to go.

"Before you go, just leave me those sheets of dates and figures you got from the girl's bank. I didn't really examine them very closely. I take it you won't want them when you talk to Captain Rathlyn, though you may want her bank statement."

"I have had copies made of that, sir. I will bring you one, together with the other papers."

A drizzle of fine February rain was falling as Hant drove out to Tandrings. He parked his car at the side of the carriage sweep, walked across to the front door and rang the bell. A minute later he was in the study facing its occupant, who, in a tweed suit, stood with his back to the fire. A glance at the detective's face told Charles Rathlyn that the attack was coming; he remained standing and did not offer his visitor a seat.

Hant took from his pocket-book the letter which Colonel Netterly had returned to him that morning.

"I must ask you to look at that, sir."

The tone of voice was curt and formal; no easy tact, no light handed fencing would be used today.

Rathlyn's face stiffened as he saw his wife's handwriting—the name and address on the envelope. He knew what this would prove to be. There had been just a chance that Isabel had been bluffing when she said she had the original, just a chance that she had merely copied it, after perhaps steaming open the envelope and later closing and posting it. In that case, though, Anne would almost certainly have told him when they had opened their hearts to each other in the Lawton woods.

Trying to keep his fingers steady, he drew out the letter and read it.

Then he looked up at the detective.

"Where on earth did you get this from?"

For a moment that need not be

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answered.

"Can you explain it, please?"

Charles Rathlyn's eye-brows rose in well-simulated disdain.

"Does it need explaining . . . to you?"

"Yes, sir, it does, and I won't beat about the bush. I am not satisfied—the Chief Constable is not satisfied—that Mrs. Rathlyn's death was accidental. It must have been clear to you that the Coroner was not satisfied either, and it is my duty now to ask you a number of direct questions. They may sound very offensive, but I have to ask them, and I want straight answers. In the first place, how do you explain this letter?"

Charles Rathlyn put the letter back into its envelope and returned it to Hant.

"Very well, Superintendent. My wife got it into her head that I had been paying too much attention to Miss Faery. She was quite mistaken. Apart from meeting her out hunting and apart from her staying to help me when I had a bad fall, I saw no more of Miss Faery than of any other casual acquaintance, except that on one occasion we went to a play together in London. Actually my wife did not know of that, and I did not tell her because she had already shown signs of being jealous of Miss Faery. As it turns out it was stupid of me to take Miss Faery to a play, but there was really nothing in it at all—nothing serious. These things do happen, you know, Superintendent. I can only assure you that my wife had no ground for jealousy at all . . . and that I did not kill her, as you seem to be suggesting."

As had been the case with Anne Faery and Colonel Netterly, Charles Rathlyn's frankness in telling of that London evening had its effect upon Hant; it took one puff of wind out of his sails. But it did not deflect him from his voyage.

"The fact remains that Mrs. Rathlyn was jealous; this letter proves it."

"But what is this letter? Where did you get it? It does not seem to have been delivered."

"No, sir; I will come to that later. Mrs. Rathlyn was jealous, and within a short time Mrs. Rathlyn was writing to her lawyer asking him to call on her urgently the next morning. On that very night, the night of writing the letter, the night before the lawyer was to call, she fell to her death."

"Well?" he asked quietly.

Rathlyn's face was an expressionless mask as he looked at the detective, but his eyes did not waver.

"I suggest that you knew of that letter, sir, and that it was your wife's intention—or that you feared that it might be her intention—to alter her will or possibly even to consult her lawyer on

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grounds for divorce."

What seemed to be genuine astonishment showed on the soldier's face.

"Good lord," he said; "you've got a lively imagination, Mr. Hant. That one about divorce, I mean. As a matter of fact I did not know about the letter, but it didn't surprise me."

"It didn't?" exclaimed Hant eagerly.

"Superintendent, you asked me about this before. Don't you remember? I told you then that although I knew nothing about the summons to Mr. Lorriner, my wife had told me that her brother-in-law, Mr. George Waygold, had come down to get some money out of her to pay his gambling debts. I suggested to you that that might have been what she wanted to see Mr. Lorriner about—to raise that money for George Waygold; or possibly . . ." for the first time a smile lightened Charles Rathlyn's face ". . . if you are so eager to change my wife's will, might she not have wanted to cut poor old George Waygold out of it?"

Hant was taken aback. He remembered now the suggested explanation which Captain Rathlyn had given, though not the last part of it. *Was* that the explanation? It seemed possible. Another puff of wind left the sails. Doggedly Hant drove on.

"Now I come to the death of Miss Wey, sir."

Watching carefully, he saw the dead-pan look return to Rathlyn's face; the smile had gone and it was not to return that day.

"You do not think she might have been murdered?"

The steady stare of the grey eyes did not waver.

"That seems to me most unlikely."

"Very well. Now, sir; you told us that Miss Wey came to you that evening to ask your advice about taking a situation with a firm of turf accountants."

"Yes."

"Would she be interested in a situation if she was about to take her life?"

With a thrill of excitement Hant saw that little beads of sweat were forming on Rathlyn's forehead. His voice was calm enough as he answered.

"I don't know the answer to that. It certainly seems unlikely."

"This was a real situation she was asking about?"

"So I gathered."

"She told you the name of the firm?"

Rathlyn shook his head.

"I think I may have already told you this. Miss Wey was a most secretive girl. She gave nothing away unless she had to. It was entirely in character for her to ask me for advice about such a situation and not tell me the name of the actual firm."

"You believe it was a genuine

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enquiry?"

"I do."

"Then how do you account for this? We have thoroughly searched Miss Wey's papers, both in her room and in another place, and there is no sign of any letter from a firm of turf accountants, or from an agency; no newspaper cutting, nothing to suggest that she was looking for a situation."

There was silence for nearly a minute as the two men looked into each other's eyes. Then Rathlyn said:

"I am sure the answer to that must suggest itself to you as well as to me; if she was indeed not looking for a situation, then perhaps it was because she *had* decided, for some unknown reason, to take her own life."

Again that tap of the sails; Hant swung the tiller to bring his boat into the remaining wind.

"Or is it, sir, that what you have told me is untrue? That she was not looking for a situation because she was counting on you to keep her?"

Charles Rathlyn drew himself sharply up.

"That is a gross suggestion," he said. "I shall not answer it."

For a moment Hant hesitated, wondering whether to use his knowledge of what Filblow had seen through the curtains of this very room. He decided to keep that card up his sleeve a little longer.

"Very well, sir. Now I come to another matter. Miss Wey . . . by the way, sir, can you tell me what her salary was?"

"Not off-hand. Monner will know that; he pays the salaries and wages."

"I see, sir. Miss Wey, I find, paid certain small sums into a Post Office Savings Bank account from time to time, but she also had an account with the Provincial and South Coast Bank in Bournemouth. She paid comparatively small sums into that also, from time to time, but within the last few months—since Mrs. Rathlyn's death in fact—two large amounts, of two hundred pounds each, were paid into her account. I have to ask you whether you know anything about those two payments."

For the first time the detective saw signs of weakening in the man opposite him. A hand went up to his mouth . . . and was taken quickly away.

"How on earth should I know about them? I know absolutely nothing of Miss Wey's bank account."

"May I ask you, sir, to give me access to your own bank account, to instruct your Bank Manager to . . ."

"No, I will not!" Rathlyn's voice was angry . . . and it was shaking. "I will not give you access to my bank account or anything else, unless you produce a warrant. And I have had enough of your

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damned insinuations. Will you please take yourself off!"

Hant turned on his heel and walked out of the room and out of the house, the tail of his eye catching the figure of Ludd as he hurried to answer the ringing of the study bell. On the detective's face was a look of grim satisfaction

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

As soon as Superintendent Hant had left, Colonel Netterly cleared off the most urgent of his routine work and then settled down to examine the papers which had come from Isabel Wey's Bournemouth bank. The one most likely to prove important was the bank statement itself—the copy of actual entries in her ledger account. These began in August 1950 with the deposit of £70 and were followed at fairly regular monthly intervals by sums of £10, £20, and occasionally £25 and £30, these larger sums appearing in 1953 and 1954. Interspersed with these entries were the periodical entries of sums representing deposit interest. Finally there were the two entries which had excited Superintendent Hant's interest—£200 on 20th November 1954, and £200 on 15th January 1955.

Well, Hant was enquiring about those now, and it was not worth speculating about them until he reported what he had discovered or failed to discover. Netterly turned to the discarded sheets of dates and money entries.

Colonel Netterly thought that if anything was to be made of them it would be better to concentrate on one year. He chose 1954, as being the latest and also because Charles Rathlyn had made a suggestion about one or two of the dates in the pencilled list for that year. Taking, then, the typewritten sheet for January 1954 he examined it carefully. Looking at the pencilled list of dates for 1954 Netterly saw that the only ones noted for January did not correspond with any of the typewritten dates.

The Chief Constable was on the point of pushing the whole subject on one side—after all, this was a C.I.D. job, not the Chief Constable's—when a surge of obstinacy drove him back to the task.

Gradually the Chief Constable worked backwards, through 1953, 1952, 1951. It was quite a surprise when, in June 1951, he found a date on the typewritten sheet which corresponded with a pencilled date. A slip of the pen, perhaps.

And then another, the 17th May also appeared on this list. Also slips of the pen? Or was his theory not correct?

Turning to June, he found much the same thing; three of the pen-

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cilled dates, which he had assumed to be days when Mrs. Rathlyn—then Mrs. Waygold—was away were dates on which the typewritten list showed that payments were made to her. One of these days was 15th June, and Netterly, hunting through his old Badminton diaries, found—as he expected—that it was in Ascot week; Ladies' Day, in fact.

Much the same thing occurred in July—two pencilled dates coincided with two typewritten dates, but in August this coincidence ceased, and it did not recur in September, October, November or December. And August 1950 was the month in which Isabel Wey had opened her bank account in Bournemouth.

A thought occurred to him; these typewritten lists were not originals, they were apparently—Monner had told Hant—copies made by Isabel Wey. They might not be correct; they might be cooked in places where cooking mattered. Monner had the originals; should he ring and ask him to bring them or send them over by Hant? Then another idea struck him; there had been, he understood, another copy of each monthly statement kept by Mrs. Rathlyn herself. Where would they be now? Reaching for the telephone, he dialled a number.

"Mr. Lorriner in? Put me through, please; Colonel Netterly . . . That you, Lorriner? Netterly here. Look; am I right in thinking that you are one of Mrs. Rathlyn's executors? I thought so. Well, did you impound all her business papers, accounts and so on? There's something I'd like to have a look at . . ."

The Chief Constable explained what he wanted; Mr. Lorriner had the accounts referred to and truth to tell had thought they might well go for salvage. He would just get formal consent over the telephone from his co-trustee, and would then send them round. They arrived within half an hour.

Before they did so Superintendent Hant had returned. Obtaining permission to report, he came eagerly into the Chief Constable's office to find 'the old buzzard,' as he disrespectfully thought of him at that moment, poring over those dreary sheets of dates and figures. Colonel Netterly looked up.

"Ah, Mr. Hant; how did you get on?"

"On the right line all right, sir. I'm pretty sure he killed them both, and I *know* she was blackmailing him."

"Has he confessed?"

"Confessed? Oh, no, sir. I wouldn't expect that."

"A confession is what is needed, I fancy," said the Chief Constable quietly.

"I'll get him all right, sir, now I know."

Colonel Netterly smiled. "Nothing like confidence," he said. "Mr.

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Hant, have you looked carefully through these lists of dates and payments?"

"I've looked through them, sir. Not to say carefully, perhaps. No significance, I fancy, sir; just a lot of dates. The bank statement is what matters—those two two-hundred-pound entries."

"Yes, the bank statement certainly is significant. So I fancy, are these others. I should like to ask that secretary chap, however, one or two questions about them." Colonel Netterly glanced at his watch. "Get yourself a bit of lunch and then slip back in the car and ask him to come over."

"Don't you want to hear my report, sir—about Captain Rathlyn?"

The Chief Constable pulled himself together.

"Yes, of course. Let's have Mr. Janson in."

When they were all seated Superintendent Hant told his story, beginning in a minor key and gradually working up to the *molto agitato* of Rathlyn's refusal to give Hant access to his bank account.

"What do you propose to do about it?" asked Colonel Netterly.

"Well, if necessary, sir, we might get an order of the Court—for access to his bank account, I mean."

"We might. What do you think, Janson?"

"The Court would want some good grounds before they made such an order, sir. What exactly has Mr. Hant got against Captain Rathlyn?"

"Ah, I forgot; you aren't quite up to date. Well, we shall have to go into all that. But not just now; get your lunch, Mr. Hant, and then go off and do as I asked, will you, like a good chap?"

It was half-past two by the time Superintendent Hant returned with Philip Monner. The lanky secretary looked nervous, as anyone might paying his first visit to police headquarters in company with a Detective-Superintendent.

The Chief Constable greeted Monner quietly and motioned him to a chair on the opposite side of his writing-table. On the table were the little piles of paper which Colonel Netterly had been examining during the morning.

"I just wanted to ask for your help with some of these accounts that are puzzling us a bit. I believe Mr. Hant has already asked you about some of them."

The rather prominent Adam's apple worked up and down in Monner's throat.

"Yes, sir."

"I understand that these typewritten ones are copies of some cash accounts that you kept for Mrs. Rathlyn—notes of payments of cash made to her by you from time to time, as she required them."

"That is so, sir."

"She wrote a cheque from time to time, you cashed it and kept

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the cash in your safe—that right?"

"Quite right, sir."

"And each month you gave her a statement of what she had had—one of these dated sheets, in fact—and she signed it. That was by way of check, of course, and for the benefit of the auditors."

"Exactly, sir. Those sheets you have, though, are not the statements I made out; they appear to be copies, made possibly by Miss Wey, though of that I am not sure. I made out two copies each month and Mrs. Rathlyn signed them both. I kept one, she kept the other. If I had known what you wanted, sir, I would have brought my original copies."

"No matter," said Colonel Netterly quietly; "I have Mrs. Rathlyn's copies here." He tapped a pile of paper beside him. The answer seemed to add to Monner's nervousness; Hant himself was rather taken aback at this new development.

"We had better deal with these originals, I think. Will you have a look at this sheet, showing the cash payments for January 1954?" Colonel Netterly handed the sheet across the table to Monner, who bent over it.

"Eight payments during the month, totalling one hundred and seventy-five pounds. Would that be a normal amount?"

"Rather above the average, I should say, sir."

"Mrs. Rathlyn used a lot of cash, I take it. What sort of things would that be for?"

A pale smile flickered across the secretary's face.

"Betting, I think, sir. Mrs. Rathlyn did not bet in large amounts, either before or after her second marriage, but she enjoyed putting the money on herself with different bookmakers. She did not keep an account with any one bookmaker. She once told me that she found it more exciting to handle the actual cash—took her back to the days of her youth, she said."

"Not very successful, it would appear, as she needed so much, so often."

"Not very, sir; but she had other uses for cash. She was very generous, and would often give a five-pound note, or even more, to someone whom she thought in trouble."

"Right; then January 1954 was a slightly above average amount. You have the dates of those payments in front of you; now would you compare them with the dates on the pencilled sheets—made, I understand you to have said, by Miss Wey. The dates do not appear to correspond at all, do they?"

Again Monner bent over the sheets of paper. Superintendent Hant stared at his chief; what on earth was all this about?

"I have no idea whatever, sir."

"Captain Rathlyn has himself suggested that they might be dates on which Mrs. Rathlyn was away

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from home. In certain cases—these dates in February, for instance, and in June—they were, he told Mr. Hant, definitely dates on which he and Mrs. Rathlyn were away from home. That being so, of course, they could not correspond with the days on which you gave out cash to Mrs. Rathlyn."

"No, sir."

Monner's voice was little more than a whisper. Hant saw that his hand, holding the sheet of paper, was trembling violently. The Chief Constable did not appear to notice.

"Well, that explains that, then," he said easily. "Though it does not explain why Miss Wey had made a note of these dates and kept them locked away in her bank. Does it, Mr. Monner?"

"A little difficult to understand what she wanted them for, isn't it? Well, now let us look at a different year. 1950. Here I notice that the copies which she made of your cash statements only begin in April and the pencilled dates only begin in May. Some reason for that, no doubt. But here we come on something different. In May two of the pencilled dates—dates which appeared to mean that Mrs. Rathlyn . . . Mrs. Waygold, I should say . . . was away appear also in your statement as days on which you paid out cash to her. How would you account for that, Mr. Monner?"

White in the face, Monner swallowed twice before replying.

"A slip, perhaps, sir. Or . . . I don't know what these pencilled dates mean. They may mean . . . they may not mean that she was away."

"I fancy that that was what Miss Wey thought they meant," said the Chief Constable quietly. "The same in June—three corresponding dates, in July—two corresponding dates, but not in August and never again in four years, except once—a slip perhaps, eh, Mr. Monner?"

"And August was the month—August 1950—when Miss Wey began to pay into her bank regular sums of ten pounds or twenty pounds a month, right up to the date of her death. Can you account for those, Mr. Monner?"

Slowly Philip Monner started to rise from his seat.

"I . . . I don't feel well," he said. "A little air . . ."

"A little drink, perhaps," said Colonel Netterly. "Jennings, some whisky."

The uniformed constable bent down and drew up from beneath his table a bottle of whisky and a glass. Like a rabbit from a hat, thought the astonished Hant. Jennings poured some whisky into the glass and walked across towards Monner with it, holding it out to him. Monner stared at it, held out his trembling hand.

"You do drink whisky, don't you, Mr. Monner? In the evenings, sometimes. Did Miss Wey drink

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whisky?"

Philip Monner swayed for a moment, then crashed forward in a dead faint.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

SUPERINTENDENT HANT knelt down beside the fallen man.

"Give me a hand, Jennings," he said sharply. "We'll get him out of here."

"No, no; leave him where he is," said Colonel Netterly. "He'll be round in a minute. Then we may get something."

Hant looked at his Chief in shocked admiration. Had he planned all this—deliberately?

"There, he's beginning to come to. Give the whisky to Mr. Hant, Jennings, and then get back to your seat and carry on as I told you. Feeling better, Monner? Give him a sip of that whisky, Mr. Hant; he'll soon be all right."

In another minute Philip Monner was back on his chair, elbows on knees, head on hands. For a minute he sat like that, two minutes, three minutes, while the others remained silent. Then he looked up.

"I'll tell you," he said hoarsely.

"Better not say any more, Monner," said the Chief Constable quietly. "There is no need for you to make any statement, but if you do I must caution you that it will be taken down in writing and may be used in evidence."

"I can't stand any more of it," he muttered. "I'd rather tell you straight away."

"Very well; go ahead."

Suddenly Monner sat upright, a flash of anger in his dark eyes. His voice was clear and strong now.

"I'm glad I killed her!" he exclaimed. "She was a devil—a bad woman. She was blackmailing me and at the same time making me . . . making me make love to her. I . . . I did love her. And I hated her and feared her. She found out that I'd been . . ."

The voice trailed off, and again Monner sank his face into his hands.

"I meant to go straight. I did really, but there's rotten blood in my veins . . ."

"Oh lord, the fellow's going to whine," thought Netterly.

"My father defrauded his employer—I expect you know all about that. I swore that I would go straight and I did until . . . I heard them all talking about a horse of Mrs. Waygold's that was sure to win. My mother was ill and couldn't go out to work; my pay wasn't enough to keep us both. I wanted money—for her, not for myself; I put some money on the horse and it won. It was too easy. I did it again, a little more money. I lost. I lost again and . . . then I began.

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"You know about those cash payments to Mrs. Waygold, sir. She was criminally careless; I don't think she ever counted what I gave her, nor looked at the monthly statements which she signed. The auditors quite rightly wanted to tighten up those cash accounts, but she wouldn't be bothered. It was all too easy. I began by putting down a little more than I had actually given her—fifteen pounds instead of ten, thirty pounds instead of twenty-five. She didn't notice. Then I began to put in dates and payments when actually she had had nothing. Still she didn't notice. But Isabel Wey did."

There was a bitter note in the man's voice now.

"I think the first time was when I had put them down somewhere and sent Isabel to look for them. She counted them—fifteen pounds. She must already have known about the monthly statements, and of course she could easily get access to any paper of Mrs. Waygold's. She remembered the date and the amount, and at the end of the month, when I handed in my statement to Mrs. Waygold, Isabel Wey saw that I had put down twenty pounds for that day.

"I think that was in March or April 1950. She didn't do anything about it at once—she wasn't going to scare me until she had got proof—she told me that. She soon spotted the fictitious dates, when I had given Mrs. Waygold no cash but entered it in the statement—money I kept myself. Then she began to copy the statements and to keep a note of the days when Mrs. Waygold was away from home, and so *couldn't* have received cash from me. That would give her proof, she said.

"For three months she kept those notes and watched the discrepancies—May, June, July 1950; you've got them there in front of you, sir. You spotted them at once."

Hant was uncomfortably conscious that *he* had not spotted them.

"Then she told me what she had found and calmly asked for what she called a 'rake-off.' She demanded fifty pounds, and I gave it her, because I knew she could ruin me. I swore that I would stop, but she just laughed at me and told me to go ahead; all she wanted was ten pounds a month—or a bit more if she needed it. I could easily squeeze a bit more, she said."

Monner paused, reached out his hand to the glass of whisky and drank it off, neat as it was. He shuddered, but spoke more firmly.

"That went on for three more years, almost without incident; it became a normal thing, but of course I didn't make any more slips about entering payments on days when she was away."

Except once, thought Netterly;

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one slip of the pen in June 1951.

"It was a queer association, that of ours.. Living so close together, having our meals together, even sitting together sometimes after dinner. And all the time she was blackmailing me. And more than that. I . . . don't know how to describe it—she fascinated me; she was very beautiful when she took that cold, hard expression off her face, and sometimes I suppose it amused her to tease me, to excite me, to lead me on to make love to her—or try to. Sometimes it was almost more than I could bear, but she knew exactly how far she could go. She once said that she was my partner in crime, but not—a sleeping partner."

Astonishingly, the man was blushing.

"Then Mrs. Waygold married Captain Rathlyn, and I thought we should have to stop—faking the cash payments, I mean. But he didn't interfere in Mrs. Rathlyn's private affairs; he did once ask me about these payments, and I could see he thought it a slipshod arrangement, but he didn't interfere. I wanted to stop, but Isabel drove me on. I ought to have defied her, but I knew she could ruin me; an accountant who has been dishonest can never get another job—especially if he has had a dishonest father."

Again the whining note jarred on Colonel Netterly.

"She began to put on the screw; she wanted more and more, and I had to give her more, even though it meant keeping nothing for myself. I was almost mad, too, with . . . with wanting her. She was driving me mad—she was a devil, a fiend. I had to . . . I had to . . ."

His voice, which had risen almost to a scream, dropped almost to a whisper as he tried to compose himself.

"I realised that it had got to stop . . . that there was only one way to stop it. Otherwise, she would be a millstone round my neck all my life. Once I had decided I became quite calm. I began to plan; something that happened when Captain Rathlyn had a bad hunting fall put the idea into my head. She told me, rather contemptuously, that Mrs. Rathlyn hadn't even got an aspirin in the house—she, Isabel, had lent her some of her Dormonal tablets, which were much stronger. I asked her about those, what she had them for, that sort of thing, quite casually. I began to look up hypnotic drugs in the forensic medicine books in the public library. I learnt how much was likely to be a fatal dose."

Monner took out his handkerchief and began to rub the palms of his hands.

"Mrs. Rathlyn's death, terrible as it was, made little difference to us. At first I thought I might get away from it all, but she soon let

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me know that she would never let go, wherever I went. I had got so far with my plans; I could see how to do it here—at Tandrings; I might never have such a chance again."

He looked at the Chief Constable, almost with admiration.

"I don't know how you knew about the whisky, sir; but of course that was it. We often had some wine for dinner, but that wouldn't do; it was too early, even if it would conceal the taste of the tablets. But whisky would do—last thing at night. I began to encourage her to have a glass of whisky last thing; she seemed to be excited about something after Mrs. Rathlyn's death, and she often sat up late and liked the whisky. I encouraged her to take it in ginger-ale—to help conceal the taste. She liked that, too. Not every night; sometimes she would go off soon after dinner and not come back, but sometimes she did come back and we . . . and we drank whisky and enjoyed ourselves. My God, enjoyed ourselves!"

What a mockery of enjoyment that had been.

"It was the tablets themselves that were the main difficulty. I soon found that they could not be got without a prescription, and I dared not ask for that, even at home when I was on holiday. If there was any suspicion it would be too dangerous. I took to going up to London on my days off and hunting round for the dishonest chemists that I knew must exist. I found them all right, and got two bottles of Dormonal—at a price. I'll give you the name of that chemist if you like."

Yes, that would be needed, but no questions must be asked from a suspect once he had been cautioned.

"I managed to get hold of an extra whisky tumbler from the pantry and locked it up—not where I normally keep the whisky. When no hue and cry was raised over the glass I decided that the time had come. I dissolved fifteen tablets in water in that goblet and locked it up. That very night Isabel had gone away for an hour after dinner, but came back; she seemed excited, almost angry, and said she wanted a drink."

Suddenly Monner slumped in his chair, as if exhausted. Hant looked enquiringly at the empty whisky glass, but the Chief Constable shook his head. One thing to give whisky to a fainting man, another to prime a confession.

"What happened after that was a nightmare," said Monner at last. "There was no difficulty in preparing the drink without her noticing what I was doing—adding whisky and then ginger ale. She drank it off and asked for more, but I didn't want to give her more; I knew there would be an autopsy, and I wasn't sure how long whisky would be traceable—whether it

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would evaporate in the time. I knelt down by her chair and put my arms round her and . . . and made love to her, hoping she would begin to get drowsy and go up to bed. I knew that she did not lock the door of her bedroom and that I should be able to go up later and do what was necessary."

A cool, calculating murderer, whatever his justification, thought Netterly.

"But she didn't; she was gay for a time and then suddenly became somnolent. I could see that there was no chance of her going up under her own steam. I should have to carry her. It was late now and everyone would be in bed, except perhaps Captain Rathlyn, and he never came our way at night. I could carry her up the back stairs. I took off my shoes; it was a risk, in case I did meet anyone, but I had to be silent in everything that remained to be done now. She was not terribly heavy and I got her up all right and into her bedroom. I . . . I undressed her and got her into bed."

"Then I hunted round and found her own Dormonal tablets; in fact there were two bottles, with a few in each. I emptied them and put those into her tooth-glass and dissolved them in a little water—left just enough to look like the dregs of a full glass and poured the rest away. I thought it safer to leave her bottles than mine, and of course I wiped off my prints and pressed her fingers round the bottles before putting them on the table beside the bed.

"She was completely asleep by this time," went on Monner, "her face flushed and blotchy, her breathing very heavy; rather a horrible sight—I tried not to look at her. I hunted everywhere, both in her bedroom and in her little office next door, trying to find the papers that I was sure she had got; I didn't quite know what, but some sort of proof which I knew she had. I couldn't find anything except some bank statements from a bank in Bournemouth and her Post Office Savings Book. I took those, because they might have suggested something to anyone investigating her death. I took some letters too, that I had not time to read then. There might have been something that pointed to me. Of course I dared not put them back later. I burned them."

Hant itched to ask about the two entries of £200, but the no-question rule must be obeyed.

"I could see that most of what I had given her must have been paid into the Bournemouth bank, but there was more besides. Of course, I had been getting nothing except my salary since Mrs. Rathlyn's death and I had had to pay Isabel by drawing on my little bit of capital; I had been able to accumulate a bit during the first three years. How you have found it all out I don't know; I thought I

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had quite satisfied Superintendent Hant when he questioned me."

Hant flushed, feeling that he had been fooled all along the line. The whole story was incredible to him, but it must be true. He had been so sure that Rathlyn had killed her—he had shut his eyes to any other possibility—a fatal mistake.

"Is that all you want to say, Monner?" asked the Chief Constable quietly.

The man shrugged his shoulders, but said no more.

"Mr. Hant, take Monner along to your room, will you, please, and get one of your people to stay with him while the transcribing is being done. Then come back here yourself."

Presently Superintendent Hant came back and stood respectfully before him.

"Well, Mr. Hant?"

"Sir, may I be permitted to congratulate you? I was all wrong and you were right, though how you knew I just can't make out."

Colonel Netterly smiled.

"Well, of course I didn't know. I just felt that there *must* be a reason for the Wey woman storing all those sheets of dates and figures. There had to be. I just plodded my slow way through them until I saw daylight. Monner did the rest."

"But, sir, how did you know he would . . . would talk? You had Jennings here all ready to take it down."

"I thought he might if I could startle him, and I didn't want to check him by having to wait while a shorthand writer was sent for."

"It was the whisky that really did the trick, sir. How on earth did you know that Monner had given it to her in whisky?"

The Chief Constable smiled.

"When I was over at Tandrings on Thursday, Ludd told me something about the meals that Miss Wey and Monner had together; Ludd thought it all a most questionable arrangement, especially as he was having to serve them himself now that they have no footman. He told me that they had wine twice a week, and he happened to mention that Mr. Monner also had a decanter of whisky and a syphon in his cupboard. I thought nothing of it at the time, but this morning, when I was trying to work out whether Monner might have killed Miss Wey, it suddenly occurred to me that that was how it might be done. It was a long shot, I suppose, but it came off."

Superintendent Hant's newfound respect for his Chief was, if anything, enhanced.

"That was a nasty piece of work, that young woman, sir. Leading him on to make love to her while she was blackmailing him. And what about what Constable Filblow saw?"

"Yes, a strange type. Some sort

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of supressed nymphomaniac, I should say."

That was a bit over Hant's head.

"Blackmailing right and left. Her own mother, this chap Monner, Captain Rathlyn."

Colonel Netterly smiled.

"You still think that, Hant?"

"Why . . . why . . . you don't mean to say, sir, that Monner killed Mrs. Rathlyn too?"

The Chief Constable shook his head.

"Oh no, of course not. I never believed that anyone killed her. I am quite sure—I always have been—that the death of Mrs. Rathlyn was a pure accident."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Monner was convicted, but with a recommendation for mercy, and until after the execution—or the possible reprieve—Superintendent Hant proposed to hold his tongue. After that he was going to have one more crack at the Chief Constable, because he could not rest happy while there remained unexplained those two large entires in Isabel Wey's account, and that apparently amorous scene which Detective-Constable Filblow had witnessed through the curtains of the study window. If the Chief Constable chose to ignore them and to instruct the head of his C.I.D. to do so, Hant would have to accept that decision. But he could not let the matter go by default.

Nor was he going to lose sight of Captain Charles Rathlyn. The household of Tandrings was by now dispersed, the house itself in the market; Captain Rathlyn—Hant knew—had taken a room in a farmhouse half-way between Tandrings and Little Lawton—a significant direction in the detective's suspicious eyes.

Charles had, in fact, done more than this; he had asked Anne Faery to marry him as soon as this unhappy case was all over, and Anne, after some hesitation, had consented. In the meantime, the executors had kindly allowed him to keep two horses, Dashalong and Primrose, in the Tandrings stables, and old Ben Penny had happily consented to look after them.

It was an intense relief to both Charles and Anne when, a fortnight after the trial, the Home Secretary recommended Her Majesty to commute the death sentence on Philip Monner to one of imprisonment for life. Home Secretaries are not called upon to give reasons for the dreadful decisions they have to make; in this case it may have been that the jury's recommendation or the medical evidence weighed with him . . . or could it be that he felt that he who eliminates a blackmailer is deserving of mercy?

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Two days after this decision became known Superintendent Hant discovered to his fury that Captain Charles Rathlyn had disappeared. Unwilling to admit that he had been caught napping, he did not at once report the fact to the Chief Constable, but made far-reaching enquiries about the absentee. It took him nearly forty-eight hours to discover the truth, and then he appeared before Colonel Netterly.

"Are you aware, sir," he asked, "that Captain Rathlyn has married Miss Faery?"

"No, has he?" he asked. "Good for him." Then, reading his subordinate's mind, he broke into a laugh. "Do you still think he killed Miss Wey?"

"No, sir, of course not. I was wrong there. But I think . . . I'm not sure . . . I want an explanation of those two entries in Miss Wey's account."

"You asked him about those, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir, I did. He put me off. And he refused to give me access to his own bank account."

"Which he had a perfect right to do," said the Chief Constable dryly. "Well, Mr. Hant, I take it you want to ask him again?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Very well, Mr. Hant, I don't want to prevent you doing what you believe to be your duty. But if you don't mind, I should like to come. Where is he now?"

"I understand somewhere in Leicestershire, sir. He and Miss . . . Mrs. Rathlyn are expected back at Nooland's Farm some time next week."

In the meantime Charles and Anne Rathlyn were in that seventh heaven that is reserved for lovers from whose path insuperable obstacles have suddenly melted away. Neither had been really in love before, each was convinced that the other was the ideal mate. Further than that, the nebulous plans that they had discussed on that afternoon when they had met in the woods and realised their mutual love had now developed into firm intention. Anne's father, yielding to pressure, had given up his plan of 'running away' to Ireland and had agreed to join forces with Charles in a bold bid to set up a 'horsecoping' business in the cream of England's hunting country. An old brother officer of his, well established near Melton Mowbray, had had a bad fall the previous month and was looking for the right man to go into partnership with him or to buy him out. Captain Faery was up at Melton now, going into figures on the basis of the latter proposition.

That tactful expedition allowed Charles and Anne to have Nooland's Farm to themselves for a week or ten days, but they had invited Gerry Fanthony to come down and spend the week-end with them.

On Saturday morning, Netterly

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found the two men sitting around the breakfast table.

"Gerry, this is Colonel Netterly, our Chief Constable, and this is Detective-Superintendent Hant. This is Gerald Fanthony, Colonel—an old brother officer of mine. May I offer you a drink?"

Colonel Netterly shook hands with Fanthony and Superintendent Hant did the same.

"Thank you very much, Rathlyn, but I've really come over to see you on a private matter—or rather, an official matter."

He glanced at Captain Fanthony, but Charles Rathlyn smiled.

"I hoped you had come to congratulate me on my marriage," he said.

"Oh, I do indeed, with all my heart," said the Chief Constable, looking rather uncomfortable.

"Thank you very much. You can talk freely in front of Fanthony. As I say, we were boys together and know all each other's sins."

"I really think it would be better . . . we shall not keep you very long."

But Charles shook his head.

"Better play a foursome," he said. "I never liked a three-ball match, and I shouldn't have a chance against your and Mr. Hant's best ball."

Colonel Netterly shrugged.

"As you like," he said. "Mr. Hant wants to ask you a question or two. I am only a spectator."

Again Charles Rathlyn smiled.

"A single, then—though I'm no golfer. Fire ahead, Superintendent."

"I want to ask you again, sir, whether you can account for the two entries of two hundred pounds in Miss Wey's bank account?"

Charles looked at him steadily.

"Still thinking it was I who killed her?" he asked.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Gerry's shocked expression. Poor old boy, it was a bit rough on him, being dragged into this.

"No, sir, but I think you can account for those entries," said Hant doggedly.

"What makes you think that?"

"Will you answer my question, please, sir?"

Charles shook his head.

"I have already told you that I know nothing about Miss Wey's bank account. How could I?"

"I suggest that you knew a great deal about Miss Wey, sir—that you were on intimate terms with her."

Charles saw that Gerry Fanthony's lean, strong hands were clenched in two very tight fists.

"Steady, old man," he said. "You and the Colonel are keeping the ring. This is a shock to you, but I was beginning to tell you about it when these gentlemen appeared. Now, Superintendent, tell me just exactly what you mean by that."

Superintendent Hant's temper was not standing up too well under this cool treatment. He was go-

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ing, now, to use the trump card that he had previously withheld—and in his view it was a smasher.

"If you were not on intimate terms with her, how does it come that one of my men saw you holding her in your arms in your study at eleven o'clock one night a week or two before she died?"

The card—the blow, a better metaphor—had got home. Then suddenly he relaxed and answered in a quiet, firm voice.

"As you know that," he said, "I had better tell you everything." He turned to Gerald Fanthony. "Old boy, will you scout outside and keep Anne occupied for five or ten minutes? I don't think it need be longer . . . but of course I don't know."

He glanced at the Chief Constable, and when the door had closed he said:

"As a matter of fact, what I am going to tell you now I have already told my wife, but it would be awkward for her to come in while I tell it to you. You know now that I am married to Miss Faery and you, Colonel, have a pretty shrewd idea when I began to fall in love with her. It was only a beginning, and except for one incident—which you both know about—we saw nothing of each other except in the hunting-field, in public, and we said no word to each other of affection of any kind, until some time after my wife's death. I had not the least idea that Miss Faery cared for me at all. But I did know that I cared for her, even that I was beginning to fall in love with her. I tell you that quite frankly."

Colonel Netterly was watching closely, and felt convinced, as he had felt when Anne Faery had talked to him, that he was hearing the truth.

"But my wife suddenly became jealous, suddenly suspected—or made out that she suspected—some sort of intrigue between us. What flared it up, Colonel, was one day last February—I forget whether you were out—when my wife suddenly decided to hunt after not being out at all that season. It was a poor day and her back hurt her and she wanted to go home, but my horse was mad fresh, and when hounds found—at the very moment she said that—I couldn't hold him and I saw the hunt out. She thought I had done it deliberately, and when I got home she rated me at the top of her voice, accusing me of staying out with Anne—Miss Faery. Isabel Wey heard her, and next day, or whenever it was, when my wife gave her a letter addressed to Miss Faery to post, she didn't post it. She kept it, and you have got it now, Colonel—or you, Mr. Hant."

Superintendent Hant nodded.

"She kept it to blackmail me with, though at that time she didn't know what a weapon it was going to be. She just thought that

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she could play me up with it, I suppose. She was a born blackmailer, as appears from what she did to poor Monner."

Again Hant nodded, knowing even more about that than Captain Rathlyn did.

"Then came my wife's death—that fall when she was sleep-walking. You were not satisfied that she *was* sleep-walking, Mr. Hant; you thought that in some way I killed her. I don't know what you thought, Colonel?"

That was an embarrassing question. Netterly had never believed any such thing, but he could not appear to let his Superintendent down. He brushed it aside.

"That was where Miss Wey saw her chance. She knew that motive might prove a crucial point; the general idea, I believe, was that I killed my wife to get eighty thousand pounds—regardless of the fact that I lost not only my wife but my very comfortable home and a standard of living far higher than I shall ever know again. But here, thought Isabel Wey, is where I come in. I produce evidence of the real motive—or rather I threaten to. Rather than let that happen, this sap Rathlyn will stump up."

Once again Superintendent Hant saw that beads of sweat had formed on Rathlyn's forehead.

"That was just what that sap Rathlyn did. If it had been just the danger of being run in for murder, I think I should have faced it without hesitation, but it was the horrible threat of dragging Anne Faery into the case, as a motive for murder, that cracked me. I gave in, or at any rate I gave in to a limited extent. She wanted money; I told her that I would give her five hundred pounds, two hundred the following month—November, two hundred in February, and the final hundred when the household broke up in March and when she would hand me that letter of my wife's. I made it quite clear that that was my limit, that if she tried to raise me I should call her to show her hand—and that I should charge her with blackmailing me. That price—five hundred—I was prepared to pay to keep Anne out of it, but I was not prepared to face a lifetime of blackmail."

Against his will Superintendent Hant was gradually coming to believe Rathlyn's story. Its devastating frankness was convincing.

"She accepted that," said Charles Rathlyn, "with one astonishing variation. She wanted me to be what she called 'a little nice to her.' I suppose she was a bit starved in that way, but anyway that was what she wanted. I don't mind telling you that it stuck in my gizzard much more than the five hundred pounds; you will understand that, bearing in mind what my feelings for Miss Faery were at the time. I was so astounded that I actually put my arms

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round her when she said it; partly to give myself time to think, partly, I suppose, because she had put her arms round my neck and my action was almost automatic."

He turned towards Hant.

"I don't know whether that was what your man saw, Superintendent, or some other occasion like it. That, of course, was back in October, but it happened again."

"Oh well," said Charles, "that was part of the price, and I hated paying it, but it was for Anne's sake. The worst part was telling her about it, but I did tell her—before asking her to marry me. I have told her the whole thing and, bless her, she took it in stride."

There was silence in the cosy sitting-room when Charles Rathlyn finished speaking. The Chief Constable rose to his feet and walking across to Charles Rathlyn held out his hand.

"Thank you for being so frank," he said.

Charles Rathlyn's face cleared.

"Thank you for believing me," he said. Then, turning to Superintendent Hant, who had also risen, he held out his hand to him.

"You too, I hope, Mr. Hant."

The detective looked him steadily in the eye, then slowly raised his hand and took Charles's.

"We'll be off now," said Colonel Netterly cheerfully. "Taken up too much of your time already. Please give my regards to Mrs. Rathlyn; I hope we may all meet again in the hunting-field next season."

Charles Rathlyn saw them to their car, and when they had disappeared down the road, returned to the sitting-room. He stumbled slightly as he crossed the threshold but reached his chair and sank back in it, his face white.

That evening there was a celebration dinner at Nooland's Farm, small but select—Charles Rathlyn, his wife, and Gerry Fanthony, his friend. Captain Faery, before going up to Melton, had given them the run of the cellar.

"If we're going to move, we'll move soon," he said. "Better drink that stuff up."

So two bottles of Bollinger '45 went the right way that evening and none of the three was the worse for it. Gerry Fanthony, indeed—notoriously light of head—was distinctly 'the better.' When in that condition his discretion—and indeed his tact—had always been noticeable for its absence. Raising his glass—the seventh or eighth—he toasted Anne and told Charles what a lucky man he was.

"You know, old man," he said, "if you had given poor Kate a push it would have been well worth it!"

"Oh Gerry," exclaimed Anne, "how can you be so horrible!"

Charles Rathlyn said nothing, but, looking at his charming young wife, he assured himself that it had indeed been well worth it.

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Sam Winthrop was lying in the dark, trussed up like a roasting turkey, with his feet tied to the footboard of his bed, when the earthquake came. Would the killer who had tied him up leave him to die . . .?

THE NIGHT OF THE EARTHQUAKE

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

THE FIRST SHOCK CAME AT 3:22 in the morning. It was a hard temblor, though not so strong as the second one a few minutes later, which did the real damage.

Sam Winthrop was lying in the dark, trussed up like a roasting turkey, with his feet tied to the footboard of his bed. His captor was asleep—perhaps—in an armchair in the living-room.

"If I'd kept my damn fool mouth shut," Sam thought to himself bitterly. But it had been involuntary. He had seen the man's picture just before, and he couldn't help recognizing him. The picture was posted all over the country, especially in the West, in postoffices and police stations and sheriffs' headquarters. So when the kitchen door had opened so softly, while Winthrop was puttering around cooking his bachelor supper, and he had turned to see the tall, lean fair man with the burn-scar running from his left temple to his cheekbone, he had cried out automatically: "Why you're—"

Those two words had been enough. The man—why call him that? Winthrop knew his name; it was Nicholas Gray—might only have given some plausible story and asked for food and shelter, if he had thought himself safe. He had no gun—the notices said he might be armed and dangerous, but when he stumbled toward the light in Sam Winthrop's kitchen in the little cottage at the south end of town, he was only a gray-faced, exhausted fugitive who had to find food and sleep before he could go on in his desperate journey.

Ordinarily he could not have overpowered Winthrop so easily, for Sam, though small, was still tough and wiry at 62. But surprise did it; and before Winthrop knew what was happening he was down on the floor and dazed from the sudden blow to the point of his

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chin. Gray picked him up easily, with a swift glance located the clothesline on the windowsill, and despite his struggles carried him like a child into the dark bedroom. There, without turning on the light, Gray proceeded rapidly to tie Winthrop up. Then he gagged him with a strip torn from the sheet and left him there without a word.

Winthrop heard him locking the front and back doors, and then rummaging around in the kitchen, after which presumably he ate the meal Sam had had almost ready for himself. He put out the light in the kitchen and came into the living-room. Sam listened hard, but Gray didn't even pull off his shoes, tired as his feet must have been. He dragged the big chair to where it could command a view of both the bedroom door and the front windows, and settled down with a weary sigh. Probably he had found some means of defense—the carving-knife or the iron hammer, perhaps—and had laid it where it would be handy before he sat down. It was a warm night, and he wouldn't need any cover.

The words on the notice ran in Winthrop's mind: "Wanted for violation of Title 18, U.S. Code, Section 1973, in that he unlawfully fled from the State of Washington to avoid prosecution for the crime of murder." The logical thing would be to head south, to try for Baja California and from there to try to get through Mexico to some part of Central or South America where he could lose himself. Gray wasn't the ordinary thug on the lam: to begin with he was English and for all Winthrop knew a newcomer to America; and according to the notices he was an accountant by profession. One might think embezzlement or forgery more in his line, but it was murder he was wanted for. He had no previous record.

These things accounted, Winthrop concluded, for his unorthodox behavior. For example, an ordinary criminal would have tied his victim to a chair, and assured himself of a good night's rest in bed. For that matter, an ordinary criminal would have had underworld connections, would have had no trouble stealing cars to take him south quickly, would have had places where he could hide safely and rest up, probably wouldn't have bucked city and state police and the Federal government in the first place. Only a miracle had got him as far as San Ambrosio uncaught.

It was at this point in Sam Winthrop's reflections that the temblor came. It was a humdinger, the worst he remembered in a lifetime in California. The bed rocked like a canoe on the ocean, things crashed to the floor from tables and shelves and the bureau. It lasted for fully a minute, while

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Sam lay helpless, unable even to yell.

It brought Nicholas Gray to his feet with a start, and to the door of the dark bedroom.

"What was that?" he demanded. It was Gray all right; the clipped British speech clinched it.

Winthrop could only gurgle under his gag.

He heard Gray click the button for the light. There was no response; evidently the quake had hit the powerhouse.

Then hands began to untie the gag. Winthrop found his breath. "Earthquake," he gasped. "A big one."

There were likely to be other following shocks, he had time to think wildly—worse ones, perhaps, which might bring the house down altogether, and leave him lying helpless under the debris. He thought of the fires that follow earthquakes, and he felt the sweat break out.

But Gray was unfastening the rope.

"Come on, old fellow," he said. "We'd best get out of here. Can you stand?"

Struggling to sit up, with his arms and legs cramped and full of pins and needles, Winthrop paused to stare in amazement at the place where Gray's tall figure showed dimly. What kind of murderer was this, for God's sake? Common sense would have told him to go away from there fast, to start running while he could, without a thought for the man he had overcome.

He climbed gingerly to his feet. Before he could speak or move, the second temblor came. It threw them both flat on the floor.

Gray caught hold of a bedpost and drew himself up again. It took Winthrop longer, still cramped as he was; he scrabbled about on the floor for a minute or two before he managed to stand. By now the night was full of noises: far as they were from the center of town, they could hear plainly the crash of falling chimneys, the shatter of glass, the howl of sirens. Over that, because so much nearer, came the sound of thin concerted screams.

"Good Lord, the Jessups!" Winthrop cried. He forgot that the man standing beside him was an escaping murderer who had been holding him captive; Gray became only another human being who could help. "Next door—the only other house near here. There are three children in that house—their mother works nights at a truck-drivers' diner."

"Hurry! Can you run?" Gray shouted back.

They reached the front door together. Gray turned the key, but the door would not open; it had jammed. The whole house was heaving; suddenly the front windows both smashed inward. They fought their way over piled-up

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furniture and out of the nearer one. The screams were louder now. "They're only little kids—and the middle one's a cripple!" Winthrop yelled.

Together they raced toward the Jessups' house. The earth was trembling still, and the big live oak between the two places was waving its branches like somebody begging for help. Gray got past it safely, but just as Winthrop reached it one of the big branches came splintering down. It caught him a glancing blow on the left shoulder, and staggered him.

What had been the Jessups' home was a huge pile of kindling against the greying sky. The moon had set, but the night was clear; with their eyes adjusted to the starlight they could see only too well. From the rear of the pile came a trail of ominous black smoke. The screams had become frantic.

The first shock from the blow on Sam Winthrop's shoulder had turned into a nauseating pain, but he dashed on beside Gray as best he could.

"Stand back!" the young man ordered curtly. "I'm experienced in this sort of thing—I went through the London blitz. I can dig an opening and break in—I'll try to find them and get them loose and then hand them out to you." He peered into Winthrop's face. "What's wrong? Are you hurt?"

"Shoulder broken, I guess," Sam muttered. "That branch hit me hard when it fell. But I can—"

"No, stay out. You'll be of more use here. This place is going to go up in flames pretty soon. If I can get any of them to you, take them back out of harm's way."

He ran to the ruined house, and Winthrop saw him stoop and wrench away a beam that was blocking what had been a door or a window. Then he threw himself and started to burrow his way inside. There was nothing Sam Winthrop could do but stand there and wait. There were only the two houses, his and the Jessups', on this unpaved street on the edge of town, and people would be having plenty to do in the rest of San Ambrosio without thinking of them. With a sinking heart he watched the sky over the business district turning a rusty, smoke-filmed red.

There was a hail from the Jessup house. Some of the fallen pieces of what had been the front porch were moving, and as Winthrop ran up he saw Anna Jessup, the oldest of the children, being pushed, white and crying, her clothes in tatters, through the narrow opening.

"She was pinned under something," Gray's voice called. "I've located the other two; I'll try to get them out."

"The fire—" There were flames now, eating through the smoke.

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"It's in the rear still—I think I can make it."

Anna clung to Winthrop, shaking, unable to speak.

"Now, don't be frightened any more, Anna," Sam said through the crackling, and through the agony in his injured arm. "Tom and Barry will be all right—the nice man will get them out too. You go and sit down in the field across the street while I help him with the boys."

"Mamma!" the ten-year-old whimpered.

"Mamma'll be here soon," Winthrop told her.

He wondered if Norah Jessup was alive. Perhaps everybody in the diner had been killed.

Barry, the baby, came next. "He was still in his crib—he's all right," Gray called. "I don't know about the last one—he's stopped screaming—but I'll try."

"He's a cripple—he can't walk," Winthrop shouted back. He had a crazy impulse to tell Gray that it was hopeless, that he should let it go now and save himself. The whole house was going to go up soon like a bonfire. Through the lurid light he glanced hastily at his own cottage, 200 feet away. Most of it still stood, at a bizarre angle, and it was not afire yet. He carried the baby to where Anna was crouching in the field, and she pulled him on to her lap, where he ceased crying and lay half asleep. Then Winthrop dashed back. It was hard by now to see whether the house was not all in flames. Through the smoke he glimpsed a movement in the opening Gray had made before. He bent down and with his unhurt arm tugged at the broken wood.

Tom was unconscious, and his head was bleeding from a deep cut. His little legs in their steel braces dragged uselessly after him as his rescuer shoved him forward. Tom had been crippled by the polio that had killed their father. Winthrop caught hold of his waist and pulled him free of the wreckage. He laid the child down on the grass behind him and grabbed the hand that was clawing at the earth in the narrow opening.

Between them they got Nicholas Gray out just before the whole wrecked house was caught in the blaze. The Englishman staggered to his feet, coughing, his face white under the streaks of dirt, his clothing ripped.

"Thanks, old fellow," he said hoarsely. "I don't think I could have made it alone."

He carried the still unconscious boy to where Anna Jessup sat with the baby. While they fought for breath they watched the fire raging across the road. The sky was paling in the summer dawn. But over San Ambrosio it was too red for sunrise, and above the roar of the nearby fire they could hear the din of continuing falls. Win-

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throp wondered dully if there were any firemen or engines to subdue the conflagration, what there was left of his native town, whether anything at all remained of his own office and all his records.

There was the sound of an approaching car. It drove cautiously over what must have been a badly damaged road, and stopped short a hundred feet from them. Sam Winthrop watched a man climb out of it.

"Betts!" he shouted. "Over here!"

"That you, Winthrop?" Betts started toward them. "I came as soon as I could to see how you'd made out."

He stared briefly at Gray as he approached, then at the Jessup children.

"Get them into town, Betts," said Winthrop, "if there's any town left. The little boy needs help. How are things there?"

"Pretty bad, but we're getting organized. We were the epicenter—it's not so bad anywhere else around. The phone lines are down, but a ham operator alerted Bakersfield, and the Red Cross has got here and set up a first aid station. The hospital's in ruins, and what's left of it is crowded to the gunwales. The fires are dying down, but the whole town's a wreck. Don't know how many dead—we're turning the town hall into a morgue. . . . Jessup kids, aren't they?" Betts asked him.

"Yes. And they'd all be dead now if my—if this man hadn't gone right into that mess over there and dragged them out before the fire got to them."

Nicholas Gray was standing there quietly. He had hardly glanced at the newcomer.

"Good," said Betts. He was too preoccupied for praise. "I can't take you all in my car, Sam; I guess I'd better get them in first and then come back for you two. How about your own auto?"

"Just an iron pancake, I guess. It was in the carport, and the whole roof came down on it. You get those kids taken care of; we can wait."

"What's the matter with your left arm?"

"Tree branch fell on it. I'll have it attended to later on. Come on, Anna, Mr. Betts is going to take you and Tom and Barry into town."

"Are you going to take us to mamma?" Anna asked, scrambling up.

Betts made a hopeless gesture. Winthrop understood it, but there was nothing he could do.

They laid Tom in the back seat, with the auto robe tucked around him to keep him from tumbling off during the rough ride, and Anna climbed into the front, and took the baby in her arms. Winthrop and Gray watched the car rattle away out of sight.

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The Englishman brushed at his clothing, trying to make himself look less conspicuous. He fished out a handkerchief and dabbed at his dirty-streaked face.

"It won't matter," said Winthrop wryly. "You're a refugee from an earthquake now."

"That's so." Gray looked relieved. "Well, I'll be on my way. You'll be all right now until that chap comes back for you."

"I'm sorry, son." Sam Winthrop's voice was quiet. "But you're not going."

"Oh, but I am."

Winthrop reached into a pocket with his good right hand, and a revolver pointed steadily at Nicholas Gray.

"You're a very brave man," Sam Winthrop said. "You're more than brave—when you had every reason to try to leave, you risked your life without a thought, first to get me out of my house, and then to save those children you didn't even know—you, who must have gone through fire already, from that scar on your face. I admire you a lot, and I like you. If we'd met under different circumstances, I think we could have been friends. But I can't let you go. You're wanted for murder."

Gray was staring almost stupidly at the gun.

"Where did you get that?" he asked. "You didn't have it when I tied you up—I felt to see."

"I know—I felt you frisk me. It was on the bureau, and it fell to the floor at the first shock. I found it and put it in my pocket while I was down ont he floor after the second one. . . . I guess you didn't hear me, son. I can't let you go. You're wanted for murder."

"It wasn't murder!" Nicholas Gray burst out. "It was a righteous execution."

"Tell me." The pointed pistol did not waver.

"You wouldn't understand—nobody would. That's why I'm running away."

"I've lived a long time, son, and I've heard a lot of things. There isn't much I wouldn't understand."

"My wife," said Nicholas Gray stiffly. "I came to England after three years, and she was dead. I was in the R.A.F. and I crashed in flames over Germany and was captured. We'd had two weeks together all told. She was only 18 and I was 20 when we were married."

"You mean," Winthrop said gently, but holding the revolver firm, "that she'd taken up with another man before she died?"

"She didn't 'take up' with him," Gray answered sullenly. "He took advantage of her. I got the whole story from her mother, after I came home. He was a Yank officer, stationed near—stationed near where they were living. Dashing sort of chap, my mother-in-law told me, a good bit older than Daphne but goodlooking and

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of course with more money than she was used to. I suppose she may have thought I was dead—they'd had no word of me at that time. I'm not pretending that Daphne was a strong character: she wasn't—she was just a sweet, pretty, unsophisticated kid who believed everything she was told."

"Those things happen," Sam Winthrop said. "They happen in war and they happen in peace too."

"I know it. I could have faced that. But she—she got pregnant. And when she told him—"

"He wouldn't stand by?"

"Worse than that. He—I got all this from my mother-in-law—scared to death, poor thing; she'd aided and abetted the affair. She isn't a strong character, either." Gray laughed mirthlessly. "He dropped all pretence of loving Daphne. He—he laughed and said how did he know it was his child? Then he turned heel and walked out on her. When she tried to reach him he'd been transferred. Pretty soon he'd wangled a transfer back to the States. Daphne and my mother-in-law both wrote him, and the letters were returned marked 'Refused.'

"It's a small town we lived in. Daphne couldn't face it. Just a month before I turned up again at home, she'd drowned herself and the unborn baby."

"I see."

"You don't—nobody can. I didn't just rush off hotheaded to avenge her. I thought about it a long time, and I came to the reasoned conclusion that in the eyes of God he was Daphne's murderer. He hadn't committed murder, legally, but he had killed my girl as surely as if he'd shot her between the eyes. So I condemned him to execution.

"It took a good many years, first to find out where he was, after the war, and then to reestablish myself in my own work so as to get together the funds to go after him. It was only a few months ago that I was ready, with my papers for entry and all the rest. I went straight to Seattle by way of Canada, and I called at his office the very first morning.

"An advertising man he was, rather a prominent chap, from all I could make out. Married, of course, with children. Daphne was just a wartime diversion.

"I sent my name into him, and perhaps it gave him a turn. Or perhaps not—it's a common enough name, and he'd never seen me. Anyway, I was let in. Great big office, very grand.

"I said: 'Are you'—Well, his name isn't important. He said he was. So I said: 'This is for killing Daphne'; and I shot him through the heart.

"I lost the pistol somewhere in Oregon," Gray ended quietly. "I've had some close calls, but I got away and they haven't caught

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me. And I'm not going to give myself up now.

"Yes you are, son. You're going into town with me when Betts gets back, and you're going to go to Seattle and stand trial. You can't take it upon yourself to avenge your private wrongs; you're a civilized man. You plead guilty, and there isn't a judge that won't go easy on you when he's heard the story. I'll go up there myself and testify to what you did here tonight, too; that will help. I know what I'm talking about; you'll get maybe two or three years in prison and then they'll send you back home to England."

"But I *can't,*" cried Nicholas Gray desperately. "I can't, I tell you! I did three horrible years in a Nazi prison—I'd rather die than go through a single day in a barred cell again. I won't let myself be taken alive."

"Then I'll have to kill you, son. I'm a good shot, old as I am; I could shoot you in the leg and disable you, but I see now that would be too cruel. If you try to run away from me I'll have to shoot to kill."

"But why, for the love of God? Why not just let me go? What's it to you? I don't want to bring up anything that's happened here, but—"

"If it weren't for you, I'd still be tied to my bed or lying dead in the wreckage of my home—and those three children would be dead in that fire over there." Winthrop glanced at the still burning Jessup house. "But I can't let you go—I just can't.

"You see, son," he said, and his voice was sad. "There's one thing you don't know.

"I'm the chief of police of San Ambrosio. Betts is my first assistant."

There was a small dreadful silence. Then suddenly Nicholas Gray wheeled and started to run.

Sam Winthrop sighed deeply. Then he shot the fleeing man neatly and precisely between the shoulder-blades.

Gray fell, and lay still where he had fallen. The old chief put the smoking revolver back in his pocket. Holding his throbbing left arm against him to keep it from dangling, he walked to the dead body. He felt the pulse and the heart, and sighed again. He glanced speculatively at the fire; it was still high enough. His lips tight against the pain, he stooped and began to drag Gray slowly by his feet toward the Jessup house. He went so near the fire that he could feel his face stinging. Then with one tremendous effort, the blood pounding in his neck, he managed with his right arm alone to lift the dead weight and heave the corpse into the heart of the flames. He himself was thrown forward with the impetus; his trouser leg caught and began to

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smoulder. With his last strength Winthrop threw himself violently back, beat out the sparks, and reeled to the edge of the road. He was too weak to stand; he collapsed in a heap on the grass.

It seemed a long time before he heard the car coming. Betts hurried over to him.

"You look all in, chief!" he exclaimed. "Here, let me help you. We'll get that shoulder of yours fixed right away. Things are getting into shape again, but we're going to need you to take charge and keep order. I left the kids with the Red Cross people; they'll be all right—the boy came to before I reached town. They haven't found their mother yet, but she may just possibly be alive."

He settled Winthrop carefully into the car, and looked around.

"What became of that other fellow that was with you—the hero?"

"He's in there," said Sam Winthrop, nodding toward the fire.

"What?"

"He heard a yowl from there—the Jessups' cat, I guess. But he thought it was another child. I yelled to him that there weren't any others, but I doubt if he even heard me.

"I went as close as I could to try to save him, but with this arm I couldn't do a thing. My own clothes caught fire—see here—and I had to give it up."

"Poor crazy fool—he was a hero all right." Betts shook his head in admiration.

"He was that. If ever a man deserved a hero's grave, he does. There won't be enough left to bury when the fire burns out. But what we can find, I'll see to myself."

"Who was he?" Betts asked. "I don't recollect ever seeing him before."

"That I'll never be able to tell you or anybody, Betts," said Chief Winthrop.

"Let's put it that he was just a stranger, passing through."

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On a sunny, perfect day, James Chase sat in his catamaran out on the great lake, and was at peace. Then a red boat moved around a distant point, and roared toward him. And the man in the red boat was armed with a deadly weapon—the . . .

WEAPON OF FEAR

by JOSEPH WHITEHILL

FOR THE FIVE DULL MONTHS OF cautious terror which had passed since his heart attack, all through the grim winter and finally into spring, James Chase had awakened each day according to a self-set but unadmitted plan. The moment his mind came to life from sleep and his memory returned, he would clamp his eyes tightly shut and inwardly inquire of his heart how it had passed the sleeping time. And his heart would sometimes speak a modest complaint—of a slight heaviness or perhaps a feeling of strictured closeness or, rarely, a twinge. Most often, though, his heart answered nothing, and James Chase drew comfort then and breathed again.

Having thus assessed his heart for reassurance, he would open his eyes. If it were still dark night and if Mary's weight were still there beside him, he would ask of the darkness what had waked him. A truck in the Tulsa street? Or had his heart stirred and whispered? Then he would close his eyes again and force the return of sleep, taking what pride he might in having been granted these four or five or six more hours he had slept—hours given to him to add to his time alive, not bought with his own wakeful vigilance.

But if it were day and Mary had left the bed to prepare breakfast, then he had won again and could keep his eyes open happily. And if it were a morning like this one, a fair soft May morning, and he waked in their cottage at the Lake ninety miles from Tulsa, and he could see the light of the new sun rippling across the pine ceiling, copying the wavelets' motion of the Lake outside, then he would smile a pale smile and put his hands behind his gray head, elbows high, and lie on his back watching the lapping glitter on the ceiling and listening to the clank of the coffee boiler and the hot snapping of bacon, and he would think, *Lord, how fine!*

When the end of the kitchen sounds came, and he judged Mary

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was moving the hot breakfast to the table, James Chase sat up carefully and slowly put on his robe and slippers. He liked to be about and doing when she came to call him. He liked to be at his best for Mary, always.

They met in the short hall outside the bedroom. Mary bobbed to a halt with a slight start: "Oh! You're up, dear. Morning. Breakfast." She searched his face and his posture as she spoke.

James Chase watched her closely, just as she watched him. "Morning. Paper here?" He could tell more from her round, lined face about his morning state than he could from his own mirror. She seemed placid and unconcerned as he bent in courtly fashion to kiss her. It *had* been a good night, then. Which was something of a surprise, really, when he considered that awful scene with Bill Doyle at the store yesterday.

She turned back toward the living room saying, "It's over there by your plate."

Now that she was no longer watching him, he extended his hand for the guiding comfort of the wall beside him, then came aware of what he was doing and dropped it.

He lost interest in the newspaper after the headlines and Little Orphan Annie, and set it aside to finish his breakfast. He sipped his coffee slowly while he looked idly out through the big one-pane window at the bright blue Lake and his mooring float and his dainty little catamaran tied there. The bronze wind-arrow at her masthead said South, and the wavelets on the Lake said steady and light. "Marvellous day. Marvellous." Not since his heart attack had he allowed himself a sail. All the fine days of warm and gentle winds this spring had happened in midweek, while he was down in Tulsa attending to as much as he dared of the affairs of Chase & Doyle, Electronic Supplies. No, he thought, not too much wind at all. Really there isn't too much.

Mary looked up from her cardfile of recipes. "Just lovely. And the Lake so high. We've never had it so high, have we?"

"No. They say the drought is over. They say this is the first time in eight years the Lake has been full to the datum level. You know, it was good last afternoon to see real water going over the tops of the gates at the dam. It's been a long time. . . . What're you going to do this morning?"

Mary tapped the brass ferrule of the pencil against her lower teeth. "Well, I have to go in to Grove after groceries first. I'm just trying to figure out what to have. What would you like?"

"Anything in your little head."

Mary smiled. "More coffee? Don't forget your pills in the jigger there. You don't get an orange one today. Isn't that nice? And

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then I expect I'll cut the grass or the hedge and water the dogwoods or something."

"That's my job. The grass and the hedge and the dogwoods are my department."

"Not yet they aren't. In two or three months, maybe."

"I can water the dogwoods, anyway. That isn't hard."

"But it wouldn't be fair."

He looked away from the Lake and gazed at her in puzzlement. "How d'you mean?"

"I mean after I get all hot and perspirey doing the grass and the hedge, then I deserve to have something cool and fun, like watering the dogwoods, don't you see?"

He smiled good-humoredly. "Okay, okay. What can I do, then?"

"How about reading out on the porch? And then when it's real warm you can take a little swim before lunch, and I'll watch."

He scowled shortly. "I've read myself sick for five months. Anyway, it's getting so I hate books. I can't even finish this paper here. You see that, don't you? Reading is out." A long silence ensued, which Mary made no sound to break. James's face darkened as he caught sight of the three bright pills waiting for him in the jigger-glass. He dumped them out aggressively into his hand and threw all three into his mouth together and swallowed them down with a gulp of coffee. Then he turned his chair so he might speak to the Lake. "Mary, do you know what a valetudinarian is?"

"Isn't he the one that makes the speech at graduation?"

James's smile was brief and sad. He pulled the robe closer about him, watching the movement of his own colorless image in the big window. "No. That's a valedictorian. A valetudinarian is somebody who fakes sick . . . a professional invalid."

Mary's answering "Oh," was small behind him.

"That's what Bill Doyle thinks I am. He as much as said it right out yesterday when I left the store."

"Bill Doyle! What does *that* one know?" Mary sounded outraged and hurt, as he had half-hoped she might.

"Maybe he's right," James went on quietly. "*I* don't know. I don't think I am, but maybe he's right. Or maybe he was just mad. He was furious with me when I left."

"Over what? What about? That Bill Doyle! I never *have* liked him anyway, all these years." The eruption past, Mary sat silent, as though shocked by what she herself had said.

James pinched the inner corners of his eyes tiredly. "Liking or not liking hasn't got very much to do with it, really. I don't *like* him much myself. You don't pick a partner because you like him, or even because you like the same

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things. A partner is somebody you *do* things well with. You know what they say about picking a business partner with more care than you pick a wife—it's a cliché by now, but it's partly true. A marriage has sex for glue to hold it together over the tough times. And I think sometimes a man can be hurt worse by the smashup of a partnership than he can by divorce."

"How would *you* know, dear?"

James wished Mary were closer, within reach of his fond hand. But he still stared out at the Lake and spoke in its direction. "My God, but he was cruel yesterday." James's voice was faint. "It's been a good partnership. For eleven whole years. Until this . . . this thing happened to me. And here's a queer thing; that it should have been me to come down with it instead of him! The statistics have failed me. Bill ever since I've known him has been the fireball, the highpowered hotshot, the bundle of tight springs. He's the one that flies his own plane and drives his little sport car and runs that speedboat of his around this Lake at fifty miles an hour, and courts three girls at once at the age of forty-three. But it wasn't him; it was placid me that had the heart attack."

"Well, what did he *say*?"

"Oh. . . . I came in yesterday morning—just to read my mail and write a few letters and say hello to the counter boys and so on. Then Bill came whooping in a little later with a big fat Bid Request from Wichita Air Navigation, wanting a bid on something around a hundred thousand dollars' worth of analog computer parts—chart recorders and oil-filled capacitors and tenth-percent resistors, that kind of thing. Bill was jumping up and down, he was so excited, and shaking the bundle of spec sheets. He kept hollering, 'Let's get on this right away, right away!' I told him it didn't have to be returned to Wichita till next Wednesday, so we could begin it Monday morring just as well, so what was the hurry?

"Well, you know how he is—always in a big sweat. Saturday doesn't mean anything to him. Neither does Sunday. He claimed it would look good if we had the bid in Wichita by Monday morning. It would look as though we were on the ball and alert.

"I told him that the only person in Wichita who would know how on the ball and alert we are would be the mail clerk who would throw our bid into the cubbyhole until Opening Hour on Thursday. That was when he got sore. He said I was losing my enthusiasm. (He almost said I was losing my grip.) I told him I was tired. He said it smelled like laziness to him. I told him maybe it was, and maybe when he got to be sixty and had a heart attack he'd be lazy that

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way too.

"Then he said, 'Well, why don't you sell me your stock, then?' I asked him if he had the cash to buy it. He said no, he'd buy it out of income, and I said no thanks, and got up to leave.

"He wanted to know where I was going. I told him you were coming downtown in the car to pick me up and drive me up to the Lake for the weekend. Then he really blew up. '*Lake!*' he said—he said it just like that—'*Lake!* Fine! Swell! Maybe that's what *I* should do too. Just throw it all up for grabs and walk out and leave the door open and go up to the Lake and piddle around in my piddly little garden! The hell with the business!' he said. He was mocking me, Mary. 'The hell with the business—let it take care of itself. My heart feels a little puny. *I* want to go up to the Lake.'

"So as I was going out the door I said to him, 'Why don't you go up to the Lake too? Really. It would do you a lot of good.' And he just stood there by the desk with the Bid Request all rumpled up in his hand, looking at me very queer. And his voice was very funny and he said, 'Maybe I will, James. I think I will.' And that was that. . . . Maybe that's what he needs—to get in that three hundred horsepower runabout of his and go tearing around some. He likes that. That's the only kind of thing he does like, really." And how he does like that, James Chase thought. There's such an amazing difference in people. He only seems happy and relaxed and peaceful when he's going fifty or a hundred or two hundred miles an hour, depending on what he's driving at the time.

Mary came quietly to take James's hand. While she stood beside his chair looking out at the Lake, James watched their pale images in the window; he thin and gray-haired and drawn closely into his robe, she rather plump and standing at ease beside him. And on the other side of the window, out-of-doors, a fair May morning waited for a man to come out in it.

Mary said, "Just a perfectly lovely beautiful day. Don't you worry about Bill Doyle, honey. Sufficient unto the day, and all that sort of thing."

"That really isn't much wind," James said. "Not too much at all."

Mary's hand tightened a little on his, then she turned away from the window and began clearing the table. "Have you read that new Wouk novel yet over there?"

"I don't want to read. I can't read." He rose from his chair a little breathless with a daring decision which had just come upon him. The day was too fine to waste. "I think I'll get dressed now. Is my heavy red sweater up here?"

"In the second drawer."

"Where—where are the sails for

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the boat?"

James wondered, as he measured her pause, whether it was a pause before a veto or a pause to remember about the sails. It seemed to go on and on, and the antipodal answers surged from side to side in his head. ("The doctor said—" or "The sails are in the—") Which?

She said finally, "You won't stay out long, will you? Only an hour the first time?"

God bless her. "Just an hour."

"And you'll stay where I can see you?"

"Right off the point here. Why don't you come along for once?"

On the way into the kitchen she smiled and shook her head. From the kitchen she called brightly, "You know me and water. A tubful is my limit, still. The sails are hanging out in the garage in the sailbag. I'll put them out on the float while you dress."

The exertion of dressing told on him more than he would admit in his face as he walked down the short gravel path to the mooring float. He consciously extended his stride in an effort to recapture some of the oldtime bounce in his step, and evidently succeeded, for Mary said, "You look just fine. Here. I'll hold the boat in while you get in. That's right. Now here are the sails." She handed the sailbag over to him. "I'll just sun here while you put them on, then I can shove you out."

"Fine," he said as he bent over the mouth of the sailbag. Untying the knot in the drawstring, his hands trembled with the old joy of doing all over again this familiar thing of pulling out the black-and-white, zebra-striped sails and finding which edge of the mainsail with slides was the foot and went on the boom, and which was the luff, to be fitted on the mast. But when he thought of the effort of going forward to bend the jib onto its stay, and the later effort there would be in tending the jib sheets, he said, "I think I'll skip the jib. It never does its share anyhow."

The cockpit of this boat was slung between two slim, deep hulls. James leaned cautiously sideways and lifted the small bailing hatch and peered into the darkness below. That hull was dry. He closed the hatch and slid across the thwart and raised the other. Dry also. "Old Peebler must have been around pumping."

Mary, with her face upturned, was returning the sun's smile. "He's come over from Grove to check the place every week this winter. He called me long distance when he heard you'd been sick. He was awfully worried about you. He said to tell that young feller to get well and come up to the Lake to help him keep ahead of the white bass."

"Gosh. . . . He must be seventy-five, and never sick a day. That's what country living does

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for you."

"All ready, dear?"

James loosed the mainsheet and felt of the soft wind with his upturned cheek. Conveniently, the catamaran was already headed into the wind. He hoisted the mainsail briskly, listening with love to the clacking of the slides as they ran up the track, then he cleated down the halyard. He caught the boom scissors as it fell, closed its legs, and stowed it under the forward apron. "Now. All ready."

Mary pushed the bow out with her foot and said finally, "You stay in sight, now."

"Don't you hand around just to watch me. I'm fine. Go on after your groceries."

"Well, no. . . . I'll be up at the house, I think."

The mainsail filled and began to draw as James held the tiller-yoke over toward him. When he had achieved a beam reach that suited him he eased the tiller and steadied on a course. *Which* course was unimportant to James at the moment. Something high inside his left arm distracted him. A pain? Is it a real pain, as might come from hauling on the halyard? Or is it something starting from inside the—inside the chest? Or is there anything there at all? Please, Lord, let it be just a simple ordinary pain without any meaning past itself, or else let it be no pain at all, but just a passing nerve thing.

James squinted up at the sail by way of distraction while he moved his left shoulder in a small circle. Still there. Please let it be just excitement. Please. He conceived the idea of lifting his left arm high over his head and flexing his fist to try to pull the little pain out. But how do you lift your arm without having Mary notice and wonder?

Turning his head, James saw his wife reach the head of the path and turn to look back at him. He raised his left arm high and waved at her. She waved back. And before he dropped his arm he flexed his fist twice. That did it. All gone. Thank God.

He slouched down in the corner of the cockpit and put his feet up on the opposite seat to retard their swelling, and he basked in the sunshine. He steered with a gentle pressure of his finger and thumb, for the wind was truly light and the boat carried no weather helm at all. He held for the wooded point at the south end of Monkey Island, two miles off, sighting on the place where the old flinty section-line road came out of the oaks and ran right down into the water. How good it was to see the Lake so full! The water came now all the way up to the edge of the woods, as it had that rainy year when the engineers first impounded the Lake with their mile-long dam far off to the south. The

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dangerous stumps were all safely covered now, too, and there was nothing in his sweet green and blue world to worry about except holding some sort of steady course.

Then he saw the first log. Glossy black and barely awash, it lay ahead across his course glistening in the sunlight like a sea-polished basalt reef. Sitting straighter for more circumspect vision, he passed the log close aboard and marveled at its great length and girth and speculated idly about its tonnage.

Surely; with every new blessing (like a full Lake) there has to be a new qualifier of that blessing (like the presence of drifting logs). James Chase smiled slightly as he assembled in his head the tidy reasoning which explained the floating log. First of all, you have a drought in the country that lasts for eight years, and all the driftwood earlier sunk at the banks of the Lake is exposed to the air and the sunlight. The Lake had lain ten feet or more below its datum level all that time, and the great free-logs of driftwood had dried out slowly and turned from black to brown, to gray, and then almost white, and the slime on the wood had dried to short, gray fur. So, for eight years they had lain above the low waters of the Lake, all around its shores. Consider the tortuous eighty-mile length of the Lake and its extravagant thirteen hundred miles of shoreline, and ask how many floating logs like this there must be.

Many. No wonder he had seen the running lights of no cruisers at all last night while he sat on the porch. No wonder there were no boats about today. Looking now for logs, James counted four in sight. And if I stood up there on the deck by the mast I'll bet I'd see a dozen.

Some time later, shortly after he had brought the boat about and laid his course for his own float far across the Lake, he heard an airplane. He turned about in the sunny cockpit and searched the western sky astern, knowing even as he did it which plane of all planes he would see.

Dropping down fast in powered descent was a shiny Ryan ST. Bill Doyle's plane. James stared at it rigidly, his breath half-arrested, waiting to see something else of the plane besides its cowl intake and its bulbous wheel pants and the leading edges of its wings. It continued directly toward him smoothly growing larger, spanning a greater and greater width of sky, and still the angle did not change. Now James could see the wing wires and the windshield of the forward cockpit, and he heard the scream of the engine blower. Just as James moved his hand over his heart to shield it, the plane levelled off and roared over his masthead no more than fifty feet up and passed sharply into a left

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climbing turn that exposed both cockpits to sight from the catamaran. The plane wobbled as the leather-skulled pilot turned and waved. The forward cockpit was empty.

No electronic blonde this time, anyway, James thought. *Think about anything. Think about anything else but this heart.* My, but it must take arm muscle to wave like that from a plane going so fast! James waved in return, using his left arm and flexing his fist twice as he did it.

The glittering plane banked sharply to the left, momentarily passing out of sight behind the zebra-striped sail, and headed back toward Monkey Island, where there was an airstrip. The engine slowed and the plane commenced a series of horsing pitches as it sank from sight behind the oaks on the island.

He's happy that way, James thought. Old No-Approach Doyle they called him at the Tulsa airport, and Bill had seemed to accept the name. Who else but Bill Doyle would have bought a trainer almost twenty years old and then have spent thousands of dollars on it to bring it up to CAA Bulletin standards? Who else would prefer the discomforts of open cockpits and a rock-stiff landing gear and a plane you had to fly hard every second? But he's happy. That sort of thing makes him happy. And to think that Surviving Partner Insurance was *my* idea!

God, what a scare! Go on, keep thinking. James looked at his wrist watch. Assuming I'm making good three miles an hour, he thought, and I have a mile and about a half to go back to the float, that should take half an hour. If the wind holds. James hooked his knee over the tiller-yoke and massaged his hands together. Ever since the plane had buzzed him his hands felt bloodless and cold and full of prickles. He dropped his knee and steered slightly upwind to avoid another log.

A little later, when he heard the remote, open-mufflered exhaust of a boat, he knew he had been waiting for it since the plane had disappeared. James stared fixedly at a point of land far up the shore of Monkey Island; Airport Cove was just around that point. James thought about the long concrete stair which connected the floating boat sheds to the airstrip at the top of the bluff.

Then a white thread of wake grew out of the mouth of the cove like a cave snake with a red eye, and the red eye was the fastest runabout on the Lake (Grand Lake, thirteen hundred miles of shoreline, eighty miles long, fifty-five thousand acres).

By some sort of natural, degradient alchemy, James Chase's golden day was turning to lead as he lived it. He watched the red boat turn as it cleared the point

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by the mouth of the cove and head directly toward him. Then he looked ahead, toward his own distant cottage, trying to see Mary somewhere about. She was not in sight. . . . She must be clipping or mowing over on the other side of the house.

Yes, that's Bill's idea of a holiday, he thought. It involves about fifty gallons of gas and never staying in one place ten minutes and buzzing me whenever he can catch me out. People are amazingly different. James looked to windward on the water, hoping for a darkening there that would mean the wind was freshening, but there was no such sign. The sun was high enough now for its track to have spread to a mica-twinkling breadth, and its warmth was making his sweater too heavy. Steering with his knee again, he pulled his sweater up with slow and careful movements. When his head was inside, and the filtered red light was in his eyes and he was smelling the moth crystals and his own close warm body-smell, it was then he heard the sound of the oncoming runabout slow away to nothing. He quickly came the rest of the way out of the sweater and looked toward the north.

The red boat had stopped and was lying dead in the water, and Bill Doyle was standing up in the cockpit. This, at the distance of more than a mile, was all James could see. He's hit a log, James thought. No. No, he hasn't. He's seen a log is all, and he's just looking at it. And he's looking around for more, I expect. Those logs'll slow him down today, you bet. . . .

The far manikin figure sat down again; the white bow wave foamed up and, seconds later, there came the distant thundering cough as the three hundred horsepower engine cleared its manifold-throat balkily and returned to life.

Twice as James watched the fast boat close the distance between them, it deflected from its course and showed him some hull —bright joy came for a moment (is he turning around?)—then the joy fled for the red boat straightened back each time and continued toward the lazy catamaran. . . . Just dodging logs is all. . . .

And to James's surprise a soft pleading cry escaped from his own constricted throat: "Go *away!* Go *away! Please,* Bill, none of your kind of fun today!" But his voice fell of its own weight, echoless, and again the only sound was the straining roar of Bill Doyle's boat coming. . . . Just like a steeplechaser. The logs don't slow him down at all. He *likes* the logs. Each one gives him a chance for another narrow squeak.

With an effort that made his eyelids flutter, James broke his rigid gaze away from the oncom-

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ing boat, and looked instead at his own mooring float. From out here it looked no bigger than a soup crouton, but it was his, and it spoke to him of peace and privacy and lazy rest in the sunshine.

He won't hit me. At great cost, James continued to look directly ahead, while the mounting thunder of the oncoming boat seemed to put vision in his hearing. The note never changed; it just grew. And as it grew, James thought, "Now it's half a mile off. . . . Now a quarter-mile. He's not changing course any at all."

Finally the fear in him rose into his throat and stopped his breath and he had to look, and child-weakness hit him with a blow, for the runabout was almost upon him. Somehow overrunning the safe turning margin, the boat kept on, and at the last second in James Chase's world it heeled abruptly to the right and passed the stern of the catamaran with a foot to spare, raining a deluge of wake into the sailboat and leaving it tossing. The sail was glossy-wet halfway to the masthead. The man in the sailboat's cockpit did not move for some time. Physically rigid out of the certain knowledge that if he moved he would break into pieces like a crazed porcelain figure, he swept his disordered brain and cleared from his ears the horrible complex of noise that persisted there. So close had the red runabout come that James had heard sounds of it that he had never heard before from any boat. To use up thirty seconds—to be certain not to die by keeping his brain moving—he sorted out the sounds. With his feet he had heard the concussive beating of the propeller in the water, jarring the floorboards of his boat. And there had been a hideous licking hiss; the sound of water tortured in shear under the motorboat. And then the open-stack blasting of the exhausts as the boat had passed.

When he dared move again—when the cement had crumbled away from his joints and he knew he was still alive, James turned his head. The runabout had passed into a wide, skidding turn and was coming back. It passed abeam at some distance off, running under partial throttle. Bill Doyle still wore his flying helmet, but he had turned up the flaps cockily and fastened the straps on top of his head. He seemed to scrutinize the catamaran carefully as he went by. Then he flashed a hectic grin and waved and opened the throttle wide.

James Chase waved back. Same old Bill Doyle, he thought. When Bill feels gay, then everybody has to feel gay. When he wants to horse around, then everybody's got to horse around with him. But listen, Bill, old boy, this isn't ten years ago. This isn't *last* year,

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even. I'd go along with you then, any time. But things are a little different now. I've been a little sick, you see, and I'm not up to much of your kind of thing any more, see? You do see, don't you? Sure you do. So let's quit, all right? I'm tired, and I don't think this sort of thing is too good for me. Sure; you understand. Why don't you make a fast run down to the dam and beat your own mark for the run?

James hopefully watched the red runabout as it turned astern of him, but its turn persisted past the heading for the dam. The turn completed, it steadied on a straight course for the catamaran. James Chase sorely needed to call to someone for help; and because he could not call, because there was no help for him, the words he had been suppressing rose in a whisper, "He's trying to kill me. He's trying to scare me to death. Oh. . . . That damned Surviving Partner Insurance."

He watched the approach of the runabout. Once it dodged aside quickly, then resumed its course. Another log, he thought dully as he composed himself as best he might for this next murderously narrow pass. He reached for his cast-off sweater, intending to raise it as a shield against the imminent drenching spray, but he was arrested in mid-reach by a fiery knot of pain under his left collar-bone. He slumped back into the corner of the cockpit, and in his eye-fixing pain he accepted that he would be soaked again.

Think about something else. Okay. I—I took one close pass all right, I can take another. . . . If I could only breathe right. . . . I'll irritate him. I'll wave at him again. Show him I'm right in there with him. Keeping even.

So when the motorboat thundered past James Chase had his wave ready for use and raised his arm in the curtain of water and waved, and smelled the gassy exhaust through the spray. The catamaran heaved and James Chase's head lolled against the cockpit coaming with a sharp blow. But James Chase was grateful to have a distracting hurt someplace else besides his chest, and he rubbed his wet head at the sore spot and thought, I can't go that again, that's all. Twice is all. Twice is too much. I'm scared Oh Lord and I don't want to die. Not now. Not this way on a pretty day. Suppose he thought I'd died that time? Suppose I fake it? Won't he go away as fast as he can then? It's really just that all I want to do is lie down and rest, so admit it. Golly I wish I could breathe.

And as James Chase let go the tiller-yoke and the mainsheet and prepared to slide to the floorboards and give everything over to chance and his fatigue, he saw the log ahead. He stared at it

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blankly, and made no move to take the tiller and steer to avoid it. His thought, if it could rightly be called a thought, was Here's an old friend. For this was the same log he had seen long ago when his world was gold, when he had first started out this morning and had speculated idly about its length and girth and tonnage.

By now the catamaran had lost much of its way, and when its slim twin hulls mounted the log there was hardly a jar. The boat came to a smooth, braked stop perched erect on the log. The mainsail luffed in a slow, flapping rhythm, making the slides click in gentle chorus on the mast track. The great log slowly sank deeper in the water, until it was wholly immersed.

The red runabout had turned again, and was making straight for the catamaran once more, before the suffocating man could get to his feet. He had no breath to call a warning. He stood swaying precariously in the cockpit, a lean wet little gray-haired man, compressing his lips spasmodically, trying to swallow down the swelling in his throat. He drew a great rattling breath and waved both his arms in semaphore fashion.

In the little hurtling runabout, Doyle half-rose in his seat and, holding the wheel with one arm, waved gaily back with the other. The boat's course did not change.

James Chase waved until he lost his balance and fell to the bottom of the cockpit. With neither the strength nor the time to rise again, he lay with his head on his arm until the great blow came. The floorboards struck up at him hard from below and a pall of solid water shut off the sun. James Chase lost consciousness in the midst of a roaring, garbled explosion.

The next he heard was the rubber-hung song of a little outboard, curiously confused with the sound of people's voices. Down here at the bottom of the wet cockpit, the sounds echoed and distorted themselves almost beyond recognition, but James heard old Mr. Peebler say, "He don't appear to be *in* the boat."

And then Mary said, "He *is*, he *is!* Oh, hurry, please. Get closer."

"I am," Mr. Peebler said, and the outboard slowed. "But I got to watch out for all them red boards an' trash left over fum that speedboat."

And James Chase opened his eyes and saw the sunshine again and thought with confused simultaneity, Now, isn't that brave of her to come out on the water, and, Golly! I'm still here.

Then he sat up and blinked at them over the cockpit coaming.

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